

Making a New Start in Life!

Has there been anytime recently when you thought that you needed to be revitalized; have a fresh start, a new beginning in your life. Maybe something new with a career, a project, a relationship, a diet, something meaningful in your life, maybe a new time in your relationship with God.

New starts can be physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, political or relational. But when they're spiritual it affects our emotional, mental, physical, relational, political lives as well. Maybe it's time for a spiritual fresh start. Maybe your spiritual life is starting to be like walking on a treadmill - you keep moving but don't get far. You're following Jesus but you'd like something deeper; more meaningful. You need a jump-start in your relationship with God.

Here, on Easter Sunday when we celebrate the greatest, most important, most significant new start that could ever be, it's a great place to begin a new time in your life - to have a fresh start in your faith; a revitalized relationship with God.

I was in Wal-mart the other day and I was noticing how many things are marked "new and improved." Some of those same things said "new and improved" when I was a kid! How many times can you improve them? Eventually you'd think they'd be improved so much they'd be like gold or something!

In most cases, they're not really new or improved. They changed the color or scent or someone added a drip of something and said, "Ok, it's new again!" But it works! We buy those "new and improved" products. It works because we love the idea of something new. The good news for us is God loves new too, and God actually DOES make things new! God's all about new. God invented new! Our lives as believers are about new birth, new life, a new relationship with God. Easter is all about NEW! In John 12:23-24 soon before he went to the cross, Jesus told us straight out that his death would be about new life - he said, *"Now the time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives."* Easter is all about fresh starts and new lives!

In Isaiah 43:19 God says *"For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness. I will create rivers in the dry wasteland."* Because Christ has risen, that promise to Isaiah is renewed in the promise God has for each of us now.

The New Testament frequently refers to Old Testament scripture to show that Jesus is the messiah and what that means. By far, the majority of those quotations and references are taken from the Book of Isaiah. Today, to really get at what this new start of Easter means in our lives, I want to take a passage of scripture in the Isaiah that shows God's pattern for what happens in the life of a believer - a pattern that was realized perfectly in the coming of the Messiah. These are Isaiah's words as he recounts a vision he had from God. The vision is one of the greatest fresh starts of the Bible.

Isaiah begins, *"It was in the year King Uzziah died that I saw the Lord. He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of his robe filled the Temple. Attending him were mighty seraphim, each having six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. They were calling out to each other, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Heaven's Armies! The whole earth is filled with his glory!' Their voices shook the Temple to its foundations, and the entire building was filled with smoke. Then I said, 'It's all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man. I have filthy lips, and I live among a people with filthy lips. Yet I have seen the King, the Lord of Heaven's Armies.' Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. He touched my lips with it and said, 'See, this coal has touched your lips. Now your guilt is removed, and your sins are forgiven.' Then I heard the Lord asking, 'Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?' I said, 'Here I am. Send me.'"*

Isaiah's experience foreshadows what it means to experience God's presence and God's forgiveness in Christ; to be touched by God and made new. When our guilt is removed and our sins are forgiven; when Jesus brings new life to us, God also calls us and sends us. Before Christ that kind of grace was only available to prophets like Isaiah. Now that grace is ours in Christ.

In Isaiah's new start there are some things you and I can set in motion as part of our new start in Christ. So I've put them together for us to think about and to do something about when we walk out of here today as new people.

The first is this. **1. You have to be Aware of the Times.** Isaiah begins by saying, *"It was in the year King Uzziah died that I saw the Lord."* It's a chronological reference identifying the exact time period and what was going

on. It's important because, after all, God CHOSE that particular time to give the vision. Why is it important to know it happened then?

Because God gives vision, speaks to us in prophetic ways and calls us to action in times when there are significant events and changes in the world. It may not be the physical death of a leader, but God speaks to us in times of change and times of pain. Whatever it is, the questions are, what's happening and what is God calling us to do?

Generally the first and biggest thing God calls us to do is to change ourselves. Why should I change? There are many reasons, but for a Christian the main reason is because God has forgiven us and called us even though we don't deserve it. We were already in God's debt and God not only forgave us, God doubled down in Christ and gave us a place in God's family and a purpose in God's design. If you don't accept that, you're missing out on the fullness of life and closeness to God that God wants for you. If you do accept it, you're also accepting a life of constant change - a life lived in mission. A lot of people go through life as believers as if there's nothing much special or different about it; as if they could live the same as anyone else around us. That's not how it is.

The resurrection changes everything. It means that NOTHING in the life of a believer is ordinary any more. God went all-in. God actually became a human being, God actually committed to suffer for us. God actually went to the extreme of dying for us, all so that we could have a new start.

Romans 5:6 says, *"When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners."* God did it and God did it at the exact right time - timing is a vital part of God's plan.

God didn't do all of that so that we could sit around and lead ordinary lives - there's nothing ordinary about a life based on resurrection! We are meant to do as much as we can as people who are part of the reign of God, but who live in evil territory. Ephesians 5:16 says, *"Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days."*

So are you ready for a new start; a fresh start? The time is ripe! God is moving now! If you'll pay attention to what God is doing in this time, God's ready and willing to take you there.

A second thing, if you want a new start, **2. You Have to Recognize It's All About God.** Think about it - most of Isaiah's vision was about God's majesty and holiness. As Isaiah describes God, he says The Lord *"...was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of his robe filled the Temple. Attending him were mighty seraphim, each having six wings. They were calling out to each other, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Heaven's Armies! The whole earth is filled with his glory!'"* It's all about God.

God's greatness and glory and holiness show us we need to change and motivate us to change. If you can experience God; if you claim a relationship with Jesus Christ and don't see much need to change, I submit to you that you haven't experienced God or don't have much of a relationship with Jesus because God is so loving, so majestic, so powerful, that just the contrast between us and God shows us how far we are from what we need to be. It makes us realize that we need a new start; we need resurrection in our lives. It's not enough that we make some simple improvements on what we are - what we are needs to die so that God can make it entirely new.

But this is where a lot of people mess up. They miss that it's all about God, and think, "It's all about me" I need a little self help. I just need to read a book or attend a seminar or watch this guy on television, and clean up my act a little bit. They realize that something needs to change. But they turn to the wrong stuff and think they can do it without giving up comfort and familiar preferences - without surrendering to God and sacrificing.

Making life altering changes isn't going to last without Jesus and it's not going to happen without going all in. A new start happens because of God. Romans 5:8-9, 11 *"But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God."* It's a new relationship - always new. And because of God and the death and resurrection of Christ I don't have to waste my life. Because of God that I CAN change and know I NEED to change. Because of God I want to change. Because of God I CAN change. It's because of the wonder and majesty of who God is and what God has done in Christ that I don't want to settle for a mediocre, pointless, powerless life.

Then... **3. You Have to Acknowledge the Truth About Your Life.** That's what Isaiah does: He says God is holy and I'm not. He says *"It's all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man. I have filthy lips, and I live among a people with filthy lips. Yet I have seen the King, the Lord of Heaven's Armies."* When I look at myself in light of God's glory, I don't look very bright.

Do you have one of those two-sided mirrors that you can flip around? One side is a normal mirror, the other side is a magnifying mirror. We have one in our bathroom. On one side you see yourself the regular way. On the other side you see all the pores and oil and imperfections on your skin. When I look at the normal side of the mirror I can say, "Well, I'm better looking than Shreck!" When I look into the magnifying mirror I think, "Whoa! I spoke too soon!"

That's the sort of thing Isaiah's was saying. In light of God's glory he saw all the imperfections and defects and deficiencies in his life and he reacted by saying "*I am doomed, for I am a sinful man!*"

When you look inside and you really, truthfully evaluate the condition of your heart in the magnifying light of God's glory you'll see that it's not pretty. But when I know the truth about my heart; when I look at it honestly, it makes me know that I need God - that I'm doomed without God. When I look at the truth of my heart the only thing that can make a difference is to remember that God loves me anyway - the contrast draws me closer to God. It makes me want to be nearer to God because I know I can't do it on my own and I don't want to live with these things that hurt and disgust me, I want to live with the God who loves me! On my own I'm a total mess. But with God, I've got a shot at a new start.

But if I'm going to get a fresh start, something has to happen. I need to experience what Isaiah experienced in his vision. In Isaiah 6:7 Isaiah tells us that in his vision a hot coal was taken and then, "*He touched my lips with it and said, 'See, this coal has touched your lips. Now your guilt is removed, and your sins are forgiven.'*" Your sin is taken care of. Your sin is gone.

God doesn't want you to live with sin or with regrets. And because of that God's offered us this incredible gift called forgiveness. 1 John 1:9 says, "*...if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.*" If we acknowledge the truth about our lives to him, he will do something about it - something that we can't do ourselves.

A few months ago, Linda noticed that she was having some difficulty seeing well at night. At first she just tried to ignore it and go on with life, but it kept getting worse. As time went by she started having trouble during the day and it got worse and worse. Finally she acknowledged that there was something serious going on and she went to the doctor and found out she had a rare type of cataracts that develop very quickly.

After she had the operations to correct this problem, Linda realized that she hadn't been seeing colors well for quite a long time - that this had been a part of her life for longer than she had realized.

Until a crisis comes, it's easy to ignore things in our lives that may be hurting us. The damage our sin does can sneak up on us. Until we acknowledge the problem, there's not a lot that can be done about it.

The good news is that God has a remedy you the sickness of our sin, if we're willing to acknowledge it. Psalm 32 says, "*Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, 'I will confess my rebellion to the Lord.' And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone!*" Isn't that great news? God cares about you and is always ready to give you new starts.

So many people just can't release the past and they still feel guilty for what they've done in the past. If you can't release the past, if you're a Christian and you still feel that guilt, that's Satan's way to keep you from being effective; keep you from living your life to its fullest and fulfilling your God given potential. Because if you have received the free gift of salvation with God through Jesus Christ you always have access to forgiveness, Satan has lost the fight and the only thing he can do now is try to slow you down and make you less effective.

So the question is, what are you not acknowledging and what are you holding on to? What are you denying and what are you not releasing to God?

People hold on to all kinds of things. Are you holding on to the guilt of failed relationships? Are you holding on to the regret of wrong choices or wrong words or hurtful things you did? God forgives. That's God's part. Our part is to acknowledge and confess the wrong we've done.

I see so many people who have been forgiven but don't live like it. We have to live in forgiveness. We have to recognize and acknowledge that we don't have what it takes; that we don't live up to the standards; that we haven't lived up to our potential and then let God take care of that and give us a fresh start.

If you're having trouble doing that can I just encourage you to talk to somebody about it. Talk about it with your small group or a close friend. When you talk about it, it gets it out in the open - you're acknowledging it. Don't be paralyzed by the past when you can be motivated by the future - the future of a fresh start which we're talking about. Especially when.

The final thing you need for a new start is, 4. **You Need to Say Yes to God.** That's what Isaiah did. In Isaiah 6:8 he says, "*Then I heard the Lord asking, 'Whom should I send as a messenger to this people? Who will go for us?' I said, 'Here I am. Send me.'*" That's saying yes to God. Here am I! Send me! Send me to do your work. Send me to do your will. Send me to be your person. Send me to carry your message Send me to make a new start.

There are really very few things in life that we can truly control. Most of us live with a lot of stress about things we can't control, no matter how much we wish we could. But there is one thing we CAN control. We can decide whether we follow where God is leading. We can decide if we will do our part or not in this new start.

Please don't allow this to be just another message with a couple of illustrations. Don't allow it to be just one more Sunday, just one more Easter holiday. Let it be a new start in your life. Let resurrection really take place in your life this morning. Like Isaiah and like the disciples that experienced Christ's resurrection first hand, say, "Here am I. Send me." They said yes to God. There is always no better time than now; no better time than right at this moment to say yes to God.

So the final question is, when will you get started? Now is a good time! It's not too late. When you come back next week, we're going to build on what we've begun talking about today. We're going to talk about what do you do when you have a new start. We'll talk about how it has an impact on your relationships and makes a difference in your life; about how it's energizing and invigorating and how it enables you to wipe away all the stuff that's doing damage and allow God to rewrite a better version of you - an updated version that's closer to what God had in mind when God created you.

All that can begin right now, this morning. All of that can begin anew every morning of your life! Lamentations 3:22-23 says, "*The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning!*" In our world, in our church, in your life, it's time for a new start! Let's pray!