

# The God Of New Beginnings

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[ 0 : 00 ] This has been quite an extraordinary day. That's a new church. A new church. Three babies baptized.

Amazing. It's a new beginning. A new beginning for the joy in congregations and the acknowledgement and dedication of a new generation of covenant children. It's a day of new beginnings.

That's something I hope we can think about a bit as I offer to you my thoughts for this evening. Let's pray. Lord God, we thank you that you are indeed a God of new beginnings. A God who makes all things new.

And so we pray, Lord, as we just rest for a while and meditate for a bit on what you have done, symbolized by what has been going on here today, God, that you would remind us of that.

And in it, Lord, bring hope. All this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, the main passage that we'll deal with is from that second letter of Paul, what we call the 2 Corinthians.

[ 1 : 04 ] And in it, Paul is asking that those who are reading this letter, that they not evaluate things according to the flesh. And by that he means according to worldly priorities, worldly standards.

Because in so doing, it can lead one away from the truth, from reality as God has revealed it. You see, Paul's ministry and apostleship are being questioned despite the fact that he's the one who was there and labored among them.

But others have come along and begin to question whether Paul really has got the goods. I mean, there's a priest like everybody else. It doesn't look so good. His eyesight's poor.

Why should I think that he has that kind of gravitas that I should follow? Paul says, that's a problem. You're looking on outward appearances and not on the heart.

I'm sure he's got in mind, right, the time when the prophet was sent to Jesse's household to choose a king for Israel. And along comes Eliab, the old boy.

[ 2 : 14 ] You know, I'm sure he was tall, handsome, you know, had all the goods beefed up. Been out there digging with those lambs, doing whatever he had to do to be a strong guy. And the prophet goes, surely this is the one.

And God says, don't judge by outward appearances. Man looks on outward appearances. God looks on the heart. And that's what Paul knows. Paul knows how God operates in that regard. And in fact, he's saying that because that's what he used to do. He used to judge things by outward appearances. That's how he used to operate.

And particularly in relation to Jesus, Paul used worldly criteria. His reliance upon outward appearances, judging according to the flesh.

That caused him to persecute Jesus by prosecuting Christians. He judged Jesus to be dangerous. False Messiah, false prophet, false teacher.

[ 3 : 16 ] And in his religious zeal, he participated in the arrest and death of these followers of Jesus, these who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah, the Son of God. That's how Paul operated.

That's the way he thought. He judged by outward appearances, by worldly standards, even if they were created by his religious scruples. Until, until one day, when he's confronted with the real Jesus, the Jesus who he did not know on that road to Damascus.

When you read the book of Acts, we've already learned that Saul has been present at the martyrdom of a Christian. He was present and he was approving of it. And now, in Acts chapter 9, it says, he's still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord.

He went to the high priest, asked him for letters to go to the synagogues in Damascus, so that when he found anyone belonging to the way, anybody following Jesus, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

He's operating according to the flesh until Jesus confronts him. A light shines bright, throws him to the ground.

[ 4 : 26 ] and Paul says, who are you, Lord? Because the voice had said to him, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

I am Jesus. I am Jesus who you are persecuting. Rise, enter the city, and you'll be told what you are to do. And then, remarkable thing, God's already speaking.

He's already ahead of this. He's spoken to a man named Ananias, and he says, Ananias, I want you to go and speak to this one, Saul. And Ananias says, wait a minute, I've heard about this guy. He operates according to the flesh.

He doesn't believe in you, Jesus. He hates you, and he hates his people. I've heard all the ways in which he has been trapping and arresting and gathering these people. And God says, no, no, I have something for him to do.

Go. And when Paul recounts this later, he says, Ananias said to him, the God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the righteous one and to hear a voice from his mouth, for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard.

[ 5 : 34 ] And now, why do you wait, rise and be baptized and wash away your sins calling on his name? Paul, you see, was now a new man. He was a new creation.

Where before he thought Jesus the false Messiah, now he knew indeed that he was the Christ. Where before he labored to snuff out this aberrant sect, he became his chief proponent in the world. Where before he was willing to put to death the followers of Jesus, he was now willing to lay down his life for them. And where before he sought the approval, the authority of religious leaders being an agent in their vain efforts to quash this movement of Jesus, he now went into synagogues and sought to persuade them from the scriptures that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Messiah. And rather than leveraging his learning and his connections within Judaism to advance Judaism and his own career, he threw it all away. He threw it all away counting as having no more worth than the dog dirt on the streets of Glasgow.

That's what the Greek means when he says they were counted to be rubbish. It was done to him. Paul was a new man.

[ 6 : 55 ] He had been born anew, created anew, and with it his whole world was reordered, recreated. He saw everything differently because now he saw the world in the light of Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

And where once he was alienated from God, indeed an enemy of God, going against God's will and his purposes, now he was at peace with God because he had been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

Listen again what he says, from now on we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.

You see, not only had Paul's sins been washed away, his mind had been cleansed. They had been cleansed of the false presuppositions, the haughty self-righteousness, the purported superior knowledge, his misguided religious zeal, all of it had been cleansed away.

He now thought differently about Christ and this had far-reaching effects. He not only thought differently about Christ, but he thought differently about his own existence.

[ 8 : 05 ] Why was he here? What was he supposed to do? And he understood differently. Now God's intention for the entire cosmos. You know what he writes in Colossians?

For in him, for in Jesus, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace through the blood of his cross. See, Paul was born anew, created again, and everything was different.

He was a new man. He thought differently. He hoped differently. He acted differently. Because Jesus had come into his life. He was now in another reality.

And far from being an alternative reality, something judged by a VR headset or mescaline or LSD, this was real reality. This was actual reality. Where before, he would have said Jesus was not the Messiah, not the Son of God, not the way, the truth, and the life.

He used to think that way, but he doesn't think that way anymore. Those falsehoods have been put to the side. They've been put to death. This was a new beginning for Paul.

[ 9 : 17 ] And it's not something, it's not something, and this is important, that was exclusive to him. He says, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

The old has passed away, behold, the new has come. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. Now it's interesting, in the ESV, the ESV translation, the one that we're using, those words, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, those words, he is, are actually supplied by the translators.

They're not in the Greek. But the translators put them in there because they think they bring clarity. That is that this individual or anybody, any individual that comes to Christ is a new creation.

And we don't want to argue with that. We've just been arguing that Paul was a new creation. You take them out, though, and what it says, if anyone is in Christ, a new creation.

See, if we remove the he is, again, which is not in the Greek, what we have is that, an idea that when somebody comes to Christ, it's an all-encompassing change.

[10:33] It's all-encompassing, it's a new creation. The NIV translation kind of points this way. If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come, the old has gone, the new is here.

In one translation, the New English Bible, it says, when anyone is united to Christ, there is a new world. The old order is gone. The new order has already begun.

See, that more all-encompassing sense that when somebody is in Christ, a new creation gathers in not only that that individual is new, but everything for that individual is new.

It's a new world. He's living in a new reality, a new world. He sees it all differently. Perhaps you know the famous quote by the Oxford Don, C.S. Lewis, I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen.

Not only because I see it, that is the sun, but because by it, I see everything else. See, when somebody comes to faith in Christ, they are coming not just to a savior, they are coming to reality.

[11:41] That is the savior who saves us in the midst of this world to show us, to lead us, to bring us into reality. That we live out in this life and that we will live out in fullness when we stand before him face to face.

See, this is what Paul is driving at, I argue. From now on, we regard no one according to the flesh, even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh. We regard him thus no longer. No longer will he use according to the flesh evaluations for people or for ministries.

Paul's life and understanding of reality has had a new beginning when he met the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus. Now, I think this is a helpful way to think about what we offer when we seek to persuade others to be reconciled to God, as Paul says at the end of that passage.

To be reconciled to God by placing their faith in Jesus what we're offering them is a new world. A new beginning on a path in a new world.

To believe that he is the savior of the world, that he is the one whom God has sent in order to save us from our sins, from the judgment that awaits in the day when God will hold all of us accountable.

What does Paul say in this passage?

[12:53] We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in his body whether good or evil. That's vitally and indeed eternally important because God's righteous judgment will fall on any who are not clothed with the garments of salvation that is the righteousness of Christ.

That day will come and it will be terrible for those who are not in Christ. However, for those who are in Christ who have been reconciled to God that's a day that one who is in Christ can look forward to.

In fact, the Heidelberg Catechism a teaching tool from the church in 1663 I believe it was written says that when Jesus returns it's a day that we can lurk to with heads held high. Isn't that a wonderful expression?

With heads held high looking in anticipation for the return of Jesus longing for it not fearful of it not concerned about it but wanting it. Jesus brings new life.

The one who places their hope in Christ for eternal life begins a new path that leads to life. But that end goal which God has saved us for that end goal that He has made for Himself a people it has implications not just for that final day in eternity but also for the here and now.

[14:14] For each day that we live between now and that day. A life lived in Christ will be full of new beginnings. What does Jesus say?

If anyone would come after me let Him deny Himself take up His cross daily and follow me. Give us each day our daily bread.

See, each new day calls for new dedication and new dependence upon Jesus. And consequently what transpires each day is far from insignificant far from mundane or worse meaningless.

Each new day is a new beginning because who knows what that day will bring. The day might bring a long awaited for joy. The day might bring an unanticipated challenge.

But with each new day that we are granted to live a new beginning has been created by the one who said at the very beginning let there be light and there was light. See, new beginnings in Christ are teleological.

[ 15 : 22 ] There you go. It's a nice philosophical theological term. Teleological. Work that into your next conversation with a friend. It's a strange word but what it means is that these new beginnings they have an end.

They have a purpose. There's a purpose in view. New beginnings in God are different from other notions of new beginnings. See, some view reality, existence as cyclical or circular.

A new beginning in the sense that it is more of the same with some differences. For some not so good. For others well, pretty good. But they just go on and on and on. Others might think of new beginnings as getting another shot to get it right.

And there's some truth in that. At times we do need to start again. Particularly if we come to understand that the choice we made to walk down a particular path is not leading to where we thought it would go.

And it only makes sense to go back to wherever it was that we veered off course and say, you know, I'm going to try this again. That has a bit of a repentance spirit about it.

[ 16 : 24 ] But new beginnings with God are always, always profitable because God has a plan. An end goal in mind. He has created our existence and it is lived out in time that is not circular but linear.

Meaning it began when God said let there be light and it's moving towards a decided and a decisive end. Paul says we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. See, each new beginning is part of that overall plan that God is working out in history and that includes virtually everything of which our lives consist of day to day.

In Psalm 90 which we read there Moses treats really with poetic realism the brevity of our lives. Compared to the eternality of God our days he says are like a dream like grass that flourishes is renewed in the morning and the evening it fades away.

We bring our years to an end like a sigh. But that does not render our days without meaning. On the contrary Moses recognizing the constraint upon our existence prays so teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. You know the other day I stumbled into the wrong city group here that Nate was leading. I thought there was another Bible study I don't know what you guys are doing I haven't quite figured it out yet but the rhythm but anyway I stumbled in and we were talking about wisdom and I offered a definition of wisdom that I've always found very helpful in fact it was on a New York City subway poster it said wisdom is knowledge rightly applied.

[ 18 : 06 ] Wisdom is knowledge rightly applied. if we listen to what Moses has to say about our lives that we only have so many days knowing that ought we not to join him in his prayer that we apply that knowledge wisely that we make the most of the days granted to us and by that I don't mean to be you know you only go around once a ride for grab for all the gusto that you can no our day today life lived out with a purpose that God has for his creation and those he has made his own by adopting him into his family so whether we are as Paul says at home as with Jesus or still here on the earth we make it our aim to please him that's being wise in the days that we have and I'm asserting it involves new beginnings that each day brings now having said that I want to go back to something that I said earlier which is that a new day can present unanticipated challenges those are new beginnings that are perhaps not welcome we would just as soon have things stay as they are it's being brought to a place where what has gone before him seems to have absolutely no immediate resemblance to what the future looks like you walk into a doctor's office for your annual checkup and you find out you have some deep malignancy that's attacking your body and threatening your life a spouse stands before the other and says

I no longer love you I found someone new I want a divorce that's new that's a new day that's a day that's different than the day before but it's not one that we welcome yes indeed the old has passed away the new has come but if we're honest in such circumstances as that we wish that it hadn't new beginnings can bring hope but they can also bring despair they can cause us to rejoice but they can also cause us to mourn and if we don't acknowledge that then we're not living in the world as it

really is being brought into faith union with Christ is not necessarily do away with the unanticipated challenge of a new beginning but it can it can change how we respond to such things you see if we go back to that teleological nature of our life in Christ we can believe that these unwelcome new beginnings have meaning that they have purpose because behind them is a God who has created all the days that will be for his creation all the days that will be for us and he is governing and guiding them to his good end this ongoing tending of creation by its creator what we call and what the church calls providence I'm going to quote the Heidelberg catechism again two questions on providence what do you understand by the providence of God the almighty and ever present power of God by which God upholds as with his hand heaven and earth and all creatures and so rules them that leaf and blade rain and drought fruitful and lean years food and drink health and sickness prosperity and poverty all things in fact come to us not by chance but by his fatherly hand how does the knowledge of God's creation and providence help us we can be patient when things go against us thankful when things go well and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and father that nothing in creation will separate us from his love for all creatures are so completely in God's hand that without his will they can neither move nor be moved see the end to which God is drawing all things of all the ways that he could have described it how does he describe it new new

I saw the new heaven and the new earth from the first heaven and the first earth had passed away the sea was no more I saw the holy city new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven and what is this place it is new in that God will dwell with man he will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain for the former things have passed away behold he says I am making all things new see not all new beginnings are welcome because they shatter what had gone on before but in God these new beginnings have meaning they have a purpose they are part of his plan that he is working out when one day we will stand before him in the new heavens and new earth and all that causes sorrow and pain here will be done away with so there is new days unwelcome but yet with hope so I'm not trying though however to minimize the unwelcomeness of some of the new beginnings but it does place them under a different category of not just new but holy why would I say that why could the lost love of a spouse or a life-threatening diagnosis be remotely holy because it's of a peace with the new reality the true reality that we're brought into when we are born anew into the family of

God you see we grieve but not as others who do not have hope because we know that God has the power to turn our mourning into dancing to rid us of sackcloth and close us with gladness I can say that such sorrowful things can be called holy because God in his providence has ordained that they are for my good and for his glory and I say that not knowing what the next day will bring nor do you but we could say it in faith because of who God is our faithful God today it's a day of new beginnings it's a day of new beginnings here in this fellowship two separate congregations have been joined into one and though there's yet a new name you know I'll just call it new church new church that's the name it is nonetheless a new entity as a new beginning and while that new beginning gives us cause for rejoicing I think it's right to acknowledge that it might involve some mourning for what has been is no longer let me just take the liberty of commending you who have been faithful to this church here in

[ 24 : 51 ] Partick you've continued your walk with Jesus you've been good stewards of the property that's entrusted to you you've persevered despite not having a settled minister and I believe that you pray that God would be kind and cause your church to prosper so even as we celebrate a new beginning we acknowledge the past a church with a long history of orthodoxy and piety towards God may God be praised and new beginnings can also involve trepidation what new church will be is yet to be realized and while we look forward to it in hope it's yet unknown we don't know what the future holds but today this day of new beginnings is indeed a holy day it's holy because it's the Lord's Sabbath it's also holy because it's a day that will never be again remember time is linear in God this is a unique day that will never be repeated and yet on this day a new church came into being babies were baptized another generation of covenant children this day is indeed a holy day unique day set apart for

God's glory we can take great comfort that in the kingdom of God there are no groundhog days you know what I'm talking about in the movie it's holy because Jesus has proven to us that he is building his church and the gates of hell or the judging according to the flesh will not stand against it so being grateful for what has been and with faith hopeful for what will be we have every reason to

believe that this new beginning is for God's glory and for our joy if you allow I'm going to end with a charge to new church and it's something penned by a previous minister of partick free church penned in 1976 Evan McDonald one of the elders of new church has in his possession a type written manuscript of some seven pages that this minister had written about the history of partick free church the minister talks about the various ways and ministers that had come and gone but he closes this with the following paragraph which though written some 50 years ago I think can still serve as a charge for us today listen to what he said the future is always uncertain the congregation has many natural advantages it is a good church building well situated there are no financial problems there's a good core of Christian people who naturally have a kind and friendly disposition but the congregation is presented with a challenge there are hundreds of people in the vicinity brought up in the free church and dedicated to Christ and baptism who have drifted away from the church and from God there are thousands of other churchless people within yards of our church building that are without God and without hope prayer to God to stop the decline and to revive the church is desperately needed fearless witnessing is required above all faith and hope in God the great master builder of his church should characterize our lives one day we shall see our church and other churches too small to accommodate those coming to seek and serve Jesus 50 years ago that was written that was the vision and it holds true today we are to pray be fearless witnesses trust and hope that indeed God would fill this place and fill other churches across Glasgow with people who are seeking Jesus today is a day of new beginnings each day is a day of new beginnings and we can trust God for each day amazing tomorrow hereafter hymn because of number what is if we are to them earlier we have, you know, they couldn't have you.» Everyone said to the old to them in compared when comes they and they are