

This message completes our Christmas Series, All I want for Christmas. We are ending on kind of a dramatic note. Christmas is over. The decade of the 2010s is over. On Wednesday, we launch into a new year, 2020, and a new decade, the 2020s. If you look at a calendar, the world is entering a new beginning. Many of us may view this time of year as a fresh start or a second chance. Don't we love new beginnings, fresh starts, and second chances?

I think one of the reasons the movie, *It's a Wonderful Life* is such a beloved Christmas classic is because it captures the intrigue of new beginnings, fresh starts, and second chances through the story of George Bailey. I hope you will be encouraged by this message.

### **It's a Wonderful Life Because God Gives Us New Beginnings**

Our text is once again in Isaiah. As we have learned the past few weeks, Isaiah lived at a time when foreign invaders were making life difficult for the Israelites. But the truth is that the Israelites made it tough on themselves because of their sin. Chapter 59 gives a list of indictments against Israel. Isaiah said,

**For your hands are stained with blood, your fingers with guilt. Your lips have spoken falsely, and your tongue mutters wicked things. No one calls for justice; no one pleads a case with integrity. They rely on empty arguments, they utter lies; they conceive trouble and give birth to evil. They hatch the eggs of vipers and spin a spider's web. Whoever eats their eggs will die, and when one is broken, an adder is hatched. Their cobwebs are useless for clothing; they cannot cover themselves with what they make. Their deeds are evil deeds, and acts of violence are in their hands. Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. They pursue evil schemes; acts of violence mark their ways. The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths. They have turned them into crooked roads; no one who walks along them will know peace. Isaiah 59:3-8**

And then in verse 20 of chapter 59, Isaiah says, "*The Redeemer will come to Zion to those descendants of Jacob who repent of their sin,*" declares the Lord."

God, in His mercy, took matters into His own hands. Seven hundred years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Isaiah prophesied and assured them of the coming redemption and

restoration from Babylon that will result in rejoicing for all his people. But more than that, the promise talks also about the future time when the Messiah will come and usher in God's favor for all people.

In Isaiah 61, verses 1-11, we will see God intended new beginnings for us when he sent his Son. And we are going to see the power of the gospel in action to bring about our new beginnings.

Let's look at how Isaiah describes the coming Messiah. The coming Messiah says,

**The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, Isaiah 61:1**

The Messiah is the anointed one, anointed by God, who has the divine title Sovereign Lord. For what purpose is He anointed with the Spirit of God? He is anointed to do the works of God.

Now Isaiah's audience would be thinking specifically about being released from Babylon captivity. But the language also refers to something called the year of Jubilee. The year of Jubilee came once every 50 years. It was a very special year when every debtor and servant throughout the land had their debts canceled. They were declared free from their masters and allowed to drop their hoes and plowshares, leave their masters, and return home free of debt.

How did the year of Jubilee work? In the 50th year, in the seventh month, on the 10th day of the month, which was the annual day of atonement, the whole nation would fast and repent for their sins. In Jerusalem, the High Priest killed the substitute, entered into the holy of holies, and sprinkled blood seven times before God. When the sacrifice was accepted, the high priest would come out and announce that ALL had been forgiven. At dusk, the shofar, or ram's horn was blown at the Temple. Then on the surrounding hills, other horns blared. But in that special 50th year, throughout Israel, debtors and indentured servants were set free from their debts. Prisoners were set free from their dark jail cells. They stood up, packed their things, walked away, and headed for home. The year of Jubilee was a year of new beginnings.

From that setting of Isaiah 61:1, we want to now turn to Luke 4, beginning in verse 16. Fast forward 700 years, we see Jesus and his special connection to the year Jubilee.

## **A new beginning story is possible because of Jesus.**

Jesus is about 30 years old. He has just been baptized. He has just returned from the wilderness where he was tempted for 40 days. His public ministry is now beginning. Where does he go first? He goes back home to where he grew up. He goes back to Nazareth where he was raised. Let's pick up the story in Luke 4:16-20.

**He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day, he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Luke 4:16-20**

It's like Jesus was saying, "Friends, family, neighbors, I, Jesus, the one who went to school here, who worked in my dad Joseph's carpenter shop, who ran and played as a boy, who fell and skinned my knee, who ran to my mom, you know her as Mary, and she wiped away my tears when I cried. I'm your neighbor and friend, and I am the anointed one. I am Joseph and Mary's son, and I am the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. I, the one who did sleepovers at your house, I am the Messiah. I am the one who has come to set people free. And under the authority of the Sovereign Lord, I declare this time to be the year of Jubilee. I am Jesus. I am your Jubilee." Luke 4:29 tells us that all the people in the synagogue wanted to run Jesus out of town and throw him off a cliff.

If you are looking for a new beginning, look no further than Jesus. His sermon that day in Nazareth had three points. I am the Messiah. The Jubilee Age has arrived. My mission will be one of deliverance. Now back to the Isaiah text that Jesus read in Nazareth. Isaiah 61:2 says the mission of Jesus was *"to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God,"*

As we said, the year of the Lord's favor was the year of Jubilee. But did you notice? Jesus stopped short here. He only quoted the first part of verse two that day. He didn't quote that he would proclaim the day of vengeance. Why is this? This verse distinguishes Jesus' first advent, Christmas, and his second advent, his return on the Day of Judgment.

Most Old Testament prophecies have a short fulfillment and longer fulfillment. It's as if Isaiah saw two mountain peaks: One in the foreground and the other in the background. The one in the foreground is the first coming of Jesus that we just celebrated

last week on Christmas Eve. And the background peak is a further fulfillment of the second coming of Jesus, which will be the fulfillment of divine judgment.

Jesus came at Christmas to usher in a new era to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. In John 12:47, Jesus said, *"I did not come to judge the world. I came to save the world."* This "year of God's favor" tells us that Jesus is patient, and this extended year of Jubilee gives everyone ample time to come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ. But just as certain as there is a year of favor, there will also be a day of judgment in the future. It will happen when Jesus comes a second time, and it will be swift and just, as if in a day, not a year. But the encouragement we can have today is new beginnings.

## **A new beginning story is possible because of the Lord's favor on us.**

Let me read through the scope of God's favor. New beginning after the new beginning pours forth in Isaiah 61.

**To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor. vv. 2-3**

And look at the result of the work of the Messiah. He is not just interested in rescuing us. He is interested in changing us. God's righteousness is what changes our lives. We were old trees growing in our image in our gardens. The Messiah uproots us and replants us in his garden where the roots can go deep, and the beauty of God changing our lives displays his splendor. The Lord's favor on us means that the Lord takes the broken stories of our past and rewrites them with a preferred future.

## **A new beginning story is possible because the Lord rewrites broken stories.**

**They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. Strangers will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. vv. 5-6**

New Beginnings should bring to mind words like rebuild, restore, and renew. It may be a picture of rescue for some, and restoration for others. As the Israelites would return from their poverty and enslavement in Babylon and see their kingdom and influence restored, so Jesus, as only he can do, rebuilds our lives out of the wreckage of our past. He restores to life families, friends, and marriages that have been dead for years. He fixes what is broken. He writes a new future, a preferred future that looks a whole lot different from our past. He renews by giving new purpose, new identity, new meaning, and new direction.

**And you will be called priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast. v. 6**

Through Jesus, our Messiah, we will represent God as ministers to other nations. We will bless other nations as we share as ministers the good news of our Messiah.

**Instead of your shame you will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace you will rejoice in your inheritance. And so you will inherit a double portion in your land, and everlasting joy will be yours. v. 7**

As Peter says, "An inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade." This inheritance is kept in heaven for us. And I think God understands that when we read these promises of a new beginning, we can be skeptical. That is why if we are exhorted to surrender all to our Messiah, we will need reassurance that the one we are called to trust for new beginnings is trustworthy.

**A new beginning story is possible because of the Lord's faithfulness to us.**

**"For I, the Lord, love justice; I hate robbery and wrongdoing. In my faithfulness I will reward my people and make an everlasting covenant with them. v. 8**

And God is faithful to establish an everlasting covenant with his people. A covenant is a promise; it's personal; it's about a total connection between God and us. Jesus said he established a new covenant with his blood, that through his shed blood on the cross, there is a new beginning for all who believe. And through his shed blood, he established his church, it's mission, and our eternal inheritance.

**Their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the Lord has blessed." v. 9**

At CPC, we see it our calling to make the name of Jesus known among all nations. And we continue to see God calling us to take the Good News of Jesus the Messiah around the world. At any time, we should be able to highlight where God is sending teams from CPC. In the next few weeks, CPC will send teams to Cambodia and Thailand. And we will send our Christmas Outreach Offering to our mission partner in Cameroon and to the vulnerable here on the Peninsula.

**It's a wonderful life because God gives new beginnings. And God uses our church to help others find new beginnings.**

New beginnings are possible because of Jesus.

New beginnings are possible because of the Lord's favor on us.

New beginnings are possible because the Lord rewrites broken stories.

New beginnings are possible because of the Lord's faithfulness.

What is our response to the promise of new beginnings? It's to worship. It's to rejoice over what God has done and will do.

**New beginnings compel us to rejoice over what God has done.**

**I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. v. 10**

**What does a new beginning require?**

The year of Jubilee is relevant to us because we've all made bad choices; we all sin and have incurred a huge debt of sin. I know that sadly many of us are still trapped by the guilt and shame we have experienced because of our sin. Unfortunately, many of us remain trapped in a cycle of shame because of what others have done to us in our past.

**A new beginning requires a fresh look at what Jesus did for you in the past.**

In a Peanuts cartoon, Lucy approached Charlie Brown with a paper and a pen and said, "Here, sign this. It absolves me from all blame." Then she went to Schroeder with the same paper and said, "Sign this. It absolves me from all blame." And then she went to Linus and said, "Here, sign this. It absolves me from all blame." As she walked away, Linus said, "Gee, that must be a nice document to have."

To have a new beginning, we must know that Jesus gave us that nice document. Jesus says to each of us. I came to give you a wonderful life. I absolve you. I forgive you. I cleanse you!

Isaiah 43:25 says, *"I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remember your sins no more."* Psalm 103:12 says, *"As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."*

**For you to have a new beginning, you must accept that your sin debt is paid in full.**

Can you trust Jesus enough to take him at his word? Remember his faithfulness. Remember his New Covenant? *"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28).*

There is a hymn that starts with, "He paid a debt he did not owe; I owed a debt I could not pay, I needed someone to wash my sin away."

**Second, you need to believe positively about God and your future. A new chapter in your story has yet to be written.**

It's a big deal to believe that God does grant second chances to live. New and exciting chapters are yet to be written about your life. Right now, most of us look back at our lives as a half-written book. We may look back and think, "It's a poorly written book. My chapters seem full of poor choices, darkness, nothing makes sense and nothing seems redeemable." But here is the deal. If we believe in a God of new beginnings, we will also think there are future chapters in our story to be written. Good stories. Stories filled with hope, purpose, and redemption. Great stories of God showing up and using you for His service.

But you can't write these future chapters. You are not a good enough writer. When you write the chapters, they don't make sense. You need a new writer. You need someone to come in that can help you make sense of your past chapters and write new chapters that tie things together, which reveals a hopeful and beautiful story. Every one of us has a clean sheet for a new chapter to be written. Every one of us already has a title to the next chapter yet to be written. "My life in 2020." Accept that your sin debt is paid in full. Believe that a new and wonderful chapter for your life has yet to be written.

**And finally, surrender. Ask God to write the next chapter of your story in 2020.**

My mom wrote books. She wrote Christian romance novels, and she wrote children's books. She never made much money writing. Where she made some modest money was when she edited manuscripts of other aspiring writers. Aspiring writers would bring their half-baked manuscripts to her, and she would fix them. She would make sure their stories made sense. She would clean up the storyline and tie up loose ends.

One time, I will never forget, she was asked to ghostwrite for a pastor who couldn't write at all. He had a story in his head that he tried to put down on paper, but it just didn't make sense. The only way he could get his incoherent story out there was to have someone else write it for him. My mom worked and worked on it, and tried to tie together a storyline that engaged the reader, helped people, and included something redeeming that glorified God. At first, this pastor attempted to control the process, and it didn't go well. But once he let go and let her use her gifts, the story unfolded beautifully.

He had to surrender. God wants us to surrender. We can't write a good story. We need God to write our next chapter. What does it look like for you to surrender in 2020? What is a practical next step of surrender as you lean into 2020?

Aren't you glad God isn't finished with your story yet? And aren't you glad God doesn't define you by your worst moments? Imagine if God wrote your story based on snapshot photos of your worst moments? I know some of us don't allow for new beginnings because we have defined ourselves by those ugly snapshots. But God is producing a long epic video of our lives with a past, present, and future, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. A long video that will define us with plenty of space for new beginnings.

And maybe a great big space for a new beginning is right here, right now, at the beginning of 2020. This morning, we need to know that God is bigger than us! He's bigger than our failures! Maybe you are ready to say something to Jesus about your story. Maybe something like this, "Jesus, I need you to do something in me. I've been allowing some things; I thought nothing could change, but I want to give you the space to bring a new beginning for me.

It's the "Year of Jubilee!" You can be set free. You can have a new beginning. You can pray as George Bailey prayed, "God, I want to live again. God, I want a new beginning." May 2020 be the year of Jubilee for you and a new beginning.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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