

Resolutions 2021

Have you made a New Year resolution? If you have, will you be able to keep it?

Making the resolution is perhaps the easiest part – keeping it can be tricky?

The message from the New Testament is that we *can* make resolutions and stick to them. In fact, that is what the coming of Jesus is all about.

He has come that we can begin again, make a new start and not only make a new start, but we can keep on going.

But starting again can be very difficult.

Going on a diet can be almost impossible if we haven't engaged our brain on it. The idea is great, but unless there is a change in our thinking and habits then the diet won't last very long – I'm speaking from personal experience because when my thinking is right then the diet follows. It needs to be wholehearted, a change of lifestyle, a change of foods and so on...

So making the New Year resolution is not just to have what we would like but I think what we need.

The wonder of the Christian faith is that God gives us the will and power to do these things. When we make a new start He is not going to abandon us, but he comes right alongside us and becomes our counsellor and our encourager.

He gives us the power to keep on going.

That's what the Apostle Paul experienced on his Christian journey. He experienced the resurrection power of Jesus; in fact he met with the resurrection power of Christ when he was on his way to Jerusalem to round up followers of Christ and have them persecuted. But on that journey Paul was to be confronted by a power much greater than his hatred for followers of Jesus. He was confronted by the love of Christ and compelled to follow Jesus and give his life to the cause of Christ.

This was Paul's new beginning and he was given a new start, and after this encounter, until the day he died, he spoke about the resurrection power.

He said in Philippians 3:10, *"I want to know Christ and the power of the resurrection"* and in Ephesians he wrote, *"I pray that you will begin to understand how incredibly great his power is to help those who believe in Him. It is that same power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honour at God's right hand in heaven."* [Ephesians 1:19-20]

The word Paul uses for power is the same word that we use for dynamite. So, what the literal translation is, *“God wants to give you dynamite power that will change your life”*.

This power is still available today to all who follow Christ.

What can this power do?

This power can cancel our past, conquer our problems, and change us from within.

That is what we need to keep our resolutions. Isn't it?

So, let us look closer at the first thing that this resurrection power does for us.

It cancels our past.

This doesn't mean that it denies our past, but it means that our past has been dealt with. All the mistakes, wrong turns, failures, problems, bad decisions - and we have all suffered them to some degree - have been dealt with.

So we begin with a fresh slate – much like that favourite Christmas gift of a bygone generation – Etch-a-Sketch, where we can wipe out what we've done and start again.

However, too many people live in the past. They can't let go of past mistakes and faults, even Christians do this!

But the good news of Jesus Christ and his reason for coming was to forgive our past and to give us a new start.

If we want to have a new start, we have to deal with the past.

God knows the things we've done, those things that we are not proud of, those things that we find it hard to let go of. The good news of Jesus tells us that all the heavy burden of guilt, hurt and memories of mistakes, has been dealt with.

All these things have been nailed to the cross with Christ.

So today, the first Sunday of a New Year, can I reassure you that the gospel message is that through Jesus Christ all your guilt, and all your sin has been nailed to the cross with him? You have a fresh start. Your slate has been wiped clean.

We've had some lovely winter weather over the last week. The fresh fall of snow on the Campsies has transformed the landscape and there is something quite therapeutic about the snow. Isaiah, 700 years before Jesus, knew this when he wrote *though your sins be red as scarlet they shall be as white as snow*.

Forgiven and forgotten, and then God treats us as his children.

The basis of this forgiveness is not based on our own goodness, or our strength, or our morality, because we all fall short of God's standards; it is based on the perfection of Christ and his total obedience to the love of his Father. You see, Jesus took our place and suffered and died for our sin, and so when God looks at us, he sees us through the lens of the sacrifice of his Son Jesus, and he sees us as forgiven, restored, renewed and spotless.

What a privilege indeed. Let us start the year knowing and believing that our slate has been wiped clean, and don't stop there, because now we can make our resolutions.

Can I suggest a resolution? and this is the resolution of Jesus: to love the Lord with all our heart, soul and mind and to love our neighbour as you love yourselves.

So, when we seek to make God the most important thing in our lives, Jesus tells us that everything else falls into place. When he becomes our highest authority and we realise that we are his servants, then everything we do will be done to please God, and that includes loving our neighbours.

The blessings of living a life that has God at the centre are amazing.

He steps into our lives and helps us overcome our fears and problems. He doesn't take them magically away, but he gives us the strength and the wisdom to cope.

That was the experience for the Apostle Paul when he wrote from his cell to the Roman Christians,

"In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us".

A conqueror is someone who gains control, who is in charge, and Paul says we even exceed this, we are more than conquerors. If we put our lives into God's hands, we are super conquerors, our past has been dealt with and our present is filled with hope and encouragement. No matter how dark our situation may be, God can turn it around. No matter how hopeless our situation seems, God brings hope. The same power that enabled Jesus Christ to rise from the dead allows us to rise above our problems.

Thirdly and finally, God will give us power to change from within.

What would you like to change about yourself?

When we trust in Jesus, we are told that we become a new creation, the old has gone and the new has come. God's spirit dwells within us. God is working in our

hearts; he is changing us into being more like his Son Jesus Christ. This is the goal for all Christians, to become like Christ in our lives.

The Holy Spirit transforms us from within. Galatians 5:22-23, is the list of the Fruits of the Spirit. We considered each of these fruits in our run up to Christmas, and these are the fruits that a Christ-filled life will exhibit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.

This is what it is all about.

That should be the resolution of every Christian, to become more like Jesus – not just at New Year but every day of our lives.

But it takes time and experience and tests and trials for us to develop these wonderful gifts. Fruit trees have to experience both the sun and the rain, the stormy days as well as the sunny days, but the tree that bears fruit overcomes all these challenges, and when the time is right, when harvest comes, there is an abundance of fruit on its branches.

It produces fruit for its survival as a species, for the seeds within the fruit can become another tree, but it produces fruit also to simply bless people and to be a means of other people experiencing the grace, mercy and love of God in their lives.

So the Christian resolution is to look at Jesus and see that he has paid the price for our sin, and that through him we are forgiven. It is to receive Christ into our lives, through the Holy Spirit, to give us strength to overcome. And finally it is to be Christians who bear the Fruit of the Spirit in their lives.

So, if you haven't made a resolution this year, perhaps now is the time.

A resolution that will not just change you in the short term but will change you for all eternity.

But we have to make that resolution in faith, and in the conviction that we really mean it, and that we really want Christ to be Lord of our lives.

Jesus Christ has the power to make these changes in your life and he has the power to enable you to get started and to keep going.

What are you waiting for?

The best decision that you will ever make is to open your heart to his love and to let his transforming resurrection power become a quality of your life.

Amen