

**Title:** As Good As New

**Text:** John 20:1-8; Colossians 3:1-4; and selected passages

**Occasion:** Easter Message

**Proportion:** We can become as good as new by opening our whole selves to God.

Welcome to our Easter services! Easter is all about change. God took the worst possible situation – the death of His Son – turned it around, used it for good and changed the world. Easter changed history. More than that it is still changing individual lives like me, like you, today.

Paul's letter to the church at Colossians says, "*Christ gives meaning to your life, and when he appears, you will also appear with him in glory.*" The purpose of Easter is not just for religious people. If you're not a particularly religious person, if you don't really feel that connected to God, congratulations. Today is for you as well.

Jesus Christ couldn't care less about religion. He was only interested in people having a relationship with God. Easter is God's invitation to become as good as new.

What do you want to make as good as new? What do you want to change about your life? What do you want to make better in your life?

Tiger Wood's first year of pro-golf stunned the sports world. He not only won the Master's Tournament but four other tournaments, making two million dollars in prizes and sixty million dollars in endorsements. Then he did something unheard of. At the end of his first year he called up his coach and said, "I want to change my golf swing. I know it could be better. I know it could be improved." Tiger Woods' coach said, "You can do it. It will take time, work, and hard work." So Tiger worked at changing the golf swing that just made him 62 million dollars. He studied videotapes of himself. He pumped iron. He

hit thousands and thousands of practice balls. In the meantime, Tiger Woods won only one tournament while he was changing his swing. But he perfected it. He got on a roll and won ten out of fourteen golf tournaments— six in a row! He became the first pro-golfer in history to hold all four major titles in golf at once. He's glad that he changed his swing. He was already great, yet he knew that he could be better.

Friends, you probably think you're a pretty good person and you are. You think, "I've got a good life, I've got a great family, I've got a good career, I'm a pretty nice person, I live in a great place, I've got it good." You're right. I have no doubt. But, you don't become a better person by trying harder. To become a better person you do three things. In order to become as good as new, we begin with the first step.

**OPEN YOUR MIND TO GOD'S POWER.** First, change the way you think. The Bible says, "*Let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.*" The average New Year's resolution lasts two weeks. Will power works for that amount of time. We try real hard, then we get tired and we give up.

However, when we change the way we think; open our mind to the possibility of God and His existence and love; when we entertain the idea that He might know everything about us and still cares about us, then we're on a the threshold of God making us as good as new.

He knows our problems. He can help us with the power that we don't have. We can tap into that power and become as good as new. So why not open our mind to the possibility that God is real, He exists, He loves us and wants to help.

Many people think they are open-minded. The Bible though says, *“Many are far away from the life of God. They have shut their minds against Him. They can’t understand His ways.”* What causes us to close our minds to God? **Hurt** can cause us to close our mind to God. If we’ve ever been hurt by a “Christian” or so-called religious person then the typical reaction is, “If that’s what God's people do, forget You, God!” Sadly, God often gets the blame for what people do.

**Pride** can cause us to close our mind to God. Pride says, “I want to run my own life, do my own thing. Forget You, God. I’m going to make my own choices in life.” Pride says, “I better than most people, so I don’t need to change.”

Another is **fear**. “I’m afraid if I open my mind to God, He will turn me into some Jesus freak. I’ll have to change my priorities and lifestyle.” Friends, , if we really want to change, we’ve got to open our minds up.

What is it that seems impossible to change in your life? Have you got a bad habit? Do you say, “I just can’t get control of my **anger!** I wish I wasn’t so **impatient**. I wish I wasn’t so **impulsive**. Do you have a **broken relationship**? Fill in this blank: **“I don’t think I’ll ever be able to \_\_\_\_\_.”** I don’t think I’ll ever.. get married. I don’t think I’ll ever... get remarried. I don’t think I’ll ever... be able to forget that person who hurt me and forgive them. I don’t think I’ll ever... get over that hurt. I don’t think I’ll ever... become new again. I don’t think I’ll ever... be able to fulfill the dream I’ve always had.” Friends, perhaps you think like this because you see the situation from your point of view instead of God’s point of view. If you could change it, you would have already done

it but you can't. You try and you go back. But when you open your mind to God's power, God can make incredible changes in your life that you never thought possible. He can change your swing. He can make you better than you were before. Yeah, you're good. But you could be better. You were made for more than what you are today.

The Bible says, *"I pray that you'll begin to understand how incredibly great God's power is to help those who believe Him. It's the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead."* Get this! The same power that raised Jesus Christ back to life two thousand years ago is the power that's available to you to make changes in your life. If God has the power to raise the dead, He can raise a dead marriage. He can raise a dead career. He can raise a dead dream. God can do anything. But there's a key. **One word in that verse – understand.** It says, *"I pray you'll understand how great His power is."* Change begins with a new understanding, an open mind to the power of God.

**Next, open your heart to God's grace.** What is grace? Grace is when God gives you **what you need** instead of what you deserve. Grace is when God **forgives** you even **before** you ask. Grace gives you new beginnings and fresh starts. Grace is the power God gives you to **make the changes** in your life that you can't do on your own. We need to open our hearts to God's grace.

The Bible says God wants to shower us with His grace. *"God has showered upon us the richness of His grace for He understands us and knows what is best for us at all times."* Ephesians 1:8 God understands you better than you understand yourself. God knows us and He knows what makes us tick. He's watches every moment of our life. He saw us

formed in our mother's womb. He watched our first breath. He knows every thought— the good, bad or ugly. He's seen it all and He still loves unconditionally. That's called grace. He knows what's best, even when we don't know what's best.

God says, **“Come to Me!** Bring the good, the bad and the ugly, the embarrassing stuff of life, the stuff nobody knows about. Bring it all to me and I will make you as good as new.” You say, “Chris, you don't know what I've done.” “You're right, I don't know what you have done, but God does. He knows everything you've ever done. He knows every single thing you've ever thought. His response is, “Yes, I know it all, and I love you anyway. Come to me.”

The Bible says, *“God says He will accept and declare us ‘not guilty’ –if we trust Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we all can be saved in the same way, by coming to Christ, no matter who we are or what we have been like.”* I love that last phrase—no matter who we are or what we have been like.” We can have His grace. My friends, I don't care what your religious background is. You may be Catholic. You may be Protestant. You may have no religion at all. God says it doesn't matter. He is not interested in religion. He simply wants a relationship with you. You can come to Him just as you are. Everyone has made a mess of their lives and maybe even a mess of those whom they love. We have not measured up to our own standards or to the standards of our parents, not to mention God's standards. We've disappointed ourselves, others and yes, God. The Good News is that God says, “I have erased your guilt. I have wiped out all the

things you've done wrong. I have eliminated your shame." That is grace. All you and I have to do is open our hearts to His grace. All we've have to do is claim it as our own.

Before you made the decision to come here, God knew that you would be sitting in this sanctuary in Tipp City, OH on Easter, so He could get you to set still long enough and say this to you, "You matter to Me. I love you. I love you so much I sent my Son to die for you and He is alive today speaking to you. I see how frustrated you are in trying to make yourself different. I am here to make you as good as new. My child, all you have to do is simply accept and trust my grace." My friend, if you do this today, you will be as good as new. You will see changes in your life you never thought possible. Do you want to be made as good as new? Do you want to be better? Yes, you're good. But you can be better. So open your mind to God's power. Second, open your heart to God's grace. He wants to forgive you and make you as good as new.

**Finally, open your life to God's love.** No one will ever love you more than God does. He loves you unconditionally. It's not based on anything you do. He loves you because He made you. He created you to love you. And He created you to know and love Him back.

Jesus Christ proves how much God loves you by coming and dying on the cross even before you knew it or understood it. Paul wrote, *"I pray that Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite Him in and that you will be able to feel and understand ...His love really is and to experience this love for yourselves."*

I pray that you will experience the love of God. Not that you just know it in your mind. You've probably heard before "God loves you." So what? Unless you have felt it then you've never been changed by it. Many know God loves them in their head, but only some know God loves them in their heart. It is when you experience, when you feel the love of God that it starts transforming you on the inside. Open up your life to God's love so you can experience it. When you do you will become as good as new.

A family was awakened by their smoke detector in the middle of the night to discover that their house was on fire. The father ran into children's upstairs bedroom and carried his eighteen-month-old baby in his arms while dragging his four-year-old son by the hand. They were halfway down the stairs when the four-year old remembered that he had left his teddy bear in his bedroom, so he broke free from his father's hand and ran back to his room to retrieve it. In the commotion and confusion, the father didn't notice that his son wasn't with him until he got outside. By now the flames and smoke trapped the little boy in his second-story room. Smoke swirled around him and he coughed and cried out from the upstairs window, "Daddy, Daddy! Help me!"

His father yelled from below, "Jump out of the window, Andy! I'll catch you!" In the darkness and smoke, the little boy yelled back, "But Daddy! I can't see you!" Daddy shouted back, "That's Okay, son. I can see you! Jump!"

The little boy looked down and saw only the smoke and darkness. Finally, recognizing his father's voice, remembering his faithfulness in catching him when he

jumped from his bed into his arms, he jumped through the smoke and into the arms of his daddy.

There are times when we can't see God because of the smoke and darkness of our guilt, or hurt, fear, or pride. Yet, God sees us. He has His eye on us. He will catch us in his arms of love once we let go and jump into His care. I believe that God is speaking today. I think that's why He brought you here today, because you were made for more than you're living. He wants to rescue you from the smoke and darkness of your life. Your heavenly Father says, "You can become as good as new. I'll help you."

Easter gives us the power to start over, to keep going. He gives us the power to change, to be different. Friends, Easter is not about big musical productions, lilies, or new clothes. It is really about personal, intimate, internal change in me and in you. It's about becoming as good as new. I invite you to pray this prayer along with me. You may use other words if you wish. Or you may say the same words. It really doesn't matter what words you use. It matters only the direction and the focus of your heart. **Let's pray.** Dear God, I would like to become as good as new. There are things in my life that need changing. So I open my mind to your power and my heart to your grace. Thank you for loving and forgiving me. Thank you for sending your Son, Jesus to die for my sins. Jesus, I invite you into my life so I can get to know you. You can be the leader of my life. I am counting on you. Amen.

