

God Promises a New Heart

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Text: Ezekiel 36:22-32

Date: Sunday, February 07, 2010, 10:30am

Series: All Things New

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Introduction: Open your Bible to the prophecy of **Ezekiel 36:22-32**. This text very clearly sounds the Gospel. "God Promises a New Heart"! There is a real question from this text. How can you love God? How can I love God? What about your family? How can they love the God who made them? Ezekiel tells us not only how human beings come to love God, but also *why* they come to love God.

Let us stand as we read **Ezekiel 36:22-32**, "Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; **I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went. 23 And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them; and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, saith the Lord GOD, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. 24 For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land.**

25 ¶ Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. 26 A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. 28 And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. 29 I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you. 30 And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen. 31 Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations. 32 **Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord GOD...**"

[Prayer for Guidance]

We find the people of Israel in captivity. They are living as foreigners in a very strange Gentile land—Babylon. The people looked around at their circumstances, and they thought their biggest problem was that they were living as captives and exiles in Babylon. But God shows them that their greatest need is not freedom from Babylon, but freedom from themselves. They don't need a restoration of their kingdom—they need a restoration of heart.

It was much the same way with the apostles after Jesus rose from the dead. Even all those years later, they were fixated on the problem of captivity. They were now under the Roman power in Israel. And Acts 1:6 says that, the disciples, "when they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?"

The greatest problems we have are not the circumstances in our lives that we normally fret about. Our greatest need is not financial relief or the restoration of broken relationships. We don't need a better job or a better marriage. Our greatest need is that God would change us and keep changing our heart.

If you are without Christ today you need a new heart. And if you are in Christ, brothers and sisters here today, we need to grow and change in Christ. We need to put off the old life, the old heart, the old man, and put on the new!

Now we must first ask ourselves a question.

- I. **What is this new heart?** It is the promise of God of spiritual perception. Verse 26, God says, "A new heart also **will I** give you, and a new spirit **will I** put within you: and **I will** take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and **I will** give you an heart of flesh". God says we have a dead, stony heart that cannot see God. John Newton said it best:

*Amazing grace how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see!*

God promises to give us "eyes to see and ears to hear" and a "heart to perceive" (**Deuteronomy 29:4**). The new heart gives us the ability to see God. The new heart is the ability to perceive God in all His holiness. Man's greatest problem is that he doesn't see his own sin as all that bad, and therefore will not seek the Lord for pardon.

The new heart is the gift of God in salvation called "regeneration". When God promises to give a new heart, He is speaking of salvation. It is the miracle of God that brings a hunger and thirst for God and His Word.

Therefore, the worst thing that God can do for us is to leave us to our own heart. In the judgments of God in Romans 1, the most devastating thing God does in the chapter is to give men "over to a reprobate mind" (**Romans 1:28**). Notice that God did not do anything per say to affect this. It says, "even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind", in other words, the worst thing God could do to a lost person is to give them what they want.

- II. **Man cannot give himself the new heart.** Salvation is not of man.

In **Ezekiel 36:23**, God paints man as helpless and utterly unwilling to effect his own salvation. God is not responding to man, because man has no desire to seek the Lord here: "Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; **I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went**".

The people of Israel were profaning God's holy name. They were not seeking God and so God had to step in and do something if something was to be done.

We find ourselves in the same situation!

If God must do all this, and my salvation depends on God's grace, what does that say about me? **It says that there's no good thing in me.** If we are saved by grace

alone, that means there is no contribution I can make to help the Lord in saving me. Grace makes man very small, and grace makes God very big.

What does **Romans 5:6** say? "For when we were yet **without strength**, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." We have no power to save ourselves. **1 Corinthians 2:14**, "...the natural man **receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God**: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually **discerned**." God gives me the perception—when I am born again I can see the kingdom of heaven.

You cannot miss what Ezekiel is communicating. ***Salvation is accomplished because of God's gracious power.*** Our salvation is ultimately about God, not about us! God is not a tool for our happiness. We are a tool for His glory! God will not be a means to anyone's end. God will be exalted!

Salvation is a gift of God! ***Without God*** I am a slave to sin, an addict of self love, a slave to my own tyrannical fleshly desires. And everyone here who has been touched by the grace of God says—it's a miracle. You should have seen me before Christ! I'm not what I once was! You couldn't have done this, but God did it! He did it, just as He said.

Think about what must be done to change each one of us. Who can change Himself? **Job 14:4**, "Who can bring a clean *thing* out of an unclean? not one". No human being that is—it's all accomplished by God!

A. **We need Heart Surgery**. I can give myself a new heart as much as I can perform open heart surgery. The natural man's problem is that he cannot see God nor himself correctly. Most lost people look at God as unreasonable because they see themselves as basically good people. God must be unreasonable to want to punish such good people.

B. **Because of the Old Heart, No One Seeks After God**. Romans 3 tells us: "no one seeks after God" (**Romans 3:10**). The lost person does not seek after God because they do not see their need for God. When God begins to do spiritual heart surgery on us, we begin to see our great need for God. But until then, we cannot help ourselves.

We cannot contribute to our salvation. Salvation must be by grace, because there is no good thing within us.

A lost person's spiritual vision is impaired. He has his "understanding darkened" (**Ephesians 4:18**). We are "by nature children of wrath" and "children of disobedience" (**Ephesians 2:3**). Without the grace of God, God says, I'm "dead in Adam"—I'm "dead in trespasses and sins". Without the grace of God, I can say "in me, that is in my flesh dwelleth no good thing"!

We are no better than Israel of old outside of the grace of God. We are so far gone from God on our best day that we cannot see God's name is great!

God owes no one salvation. He's saves us out of His grace. You would never have come to God or seen Him had He not chosen to reveal Himself to you. Outside of God's grace, I cannot help myself.

III. **God does not have to give us a new heart.** Our salvation is all of **grace**. God does not save us for our own sakes. That is what He says in **verse 22**: "I do not *this* for your sakes... but for mine holy name's sake". It is always "to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved" (**Ephesians 1:6**). God has no more obligation to save us than He is obliged to redeem fallen angels. God's purpose in saving us is to show how loving, forgiving, and merciful God is.

In this passage we come to the very heart of Ezekiel's salvation theology. Jesus referred to this very prophecy in **John 3**, to show Nicodemus how Old Testament saints are saved.

- A. What this tells us is that salvation has always been of grace. The message of salvation has never changed. God has never been under obligation to save anyone!
- Whether it is the promise to **Adam** that the Messiah will come through Eve's seed,
 - or that God would bless **Abraham's** seed as the stars of heaven,
 - or the promise of **David's** seed to rule forever—it is the everlasting Gospel that Jesus saves.
 - This is the Gospel that **Ezekiel** was preaching to the Jewish captives of Babylon.

God will save you and change you, not because of you, but because of Jesus' mercy. There is nothing in us that compels God to save us. This is the Gospel Ezekiel preached, and it is the Gospel we give today. It is the Gospel that Jesus preached to Nicodemus.

- B. It is this text more than any other that tells us how God saves people of all times. This text is referred to by Jesus Christ Himself in **John 3**. Nicodemus was pressing the Lord to tell Him how any one is saved. Jesus looks out over the entire Old Testament and summarizes the Gospel message: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (**John 3:3**). Nicodemus marveled. What? He'd missed it! He'd taught God's Word, but he missed the main message! This was an offense to the Jews, because they wanted to do something to affect their salvation.

Christ gave a gentle rebuke to Nicodemus for not knowing this. Remember he asked Nicodemus, "Are you a teacher in Israel and yet you do not understand these things?" (**John 3:10**). My guess is Christ was asking Nicodemus: "what you're a teacher in Israel, and you've never read **Ezekiel 36**? This is the exact message Ezekiel was preaching to the captives in his day. The Spirit of God must draw and illuminate and give spiritual understanding and perception—a new heart. Unless there is a radical change in the heart, an openness to the things of God, a desire to know God, there can be no spiritual life.

God does all of this because of His glory, **not for our sakes**. He pardons us for His purposes, not for ours! It's all of grace because it has to be of grace. No wonder the prophet Micah could say: "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity..." (**Micah 7:18**). Who is a God like unto God, that can forgive sin like our God forgives sin?! There is no sin so vile that God cannot and will not pardon it! Should we not give "all to the praise of the glory of His grace"?

The reason for grace is not found within the receiver of grace. It is found in the giver! God says: "I do not *this* for your sakes... but for mine holy name's sake" (**22**).

Paul asks in **Romans 2:4**, Don't you know "that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?"

Implications.

1. If salvation is all of grace, then there is no way we can hope to earn salvation. To attempt works is to deny grace. You give saving your own soul your best shot, and Isaiah says, the best you can do is filthy rags. Your best works on your best day are filthy rags. Paul talks of those who "being ignorant of God's righteousness, went about trying to establish their own righteousness". It didn't work in Paul's day or in Ezekiel's day, and it will not work today. Grace is such a rebuke to pride. We cannot earn it in anyway. We cannot contribute to our own salvation.
2. Yet neither are we to despair of salvation. Grace is always greater than all our sin! There's no man that can say, "I'm so great a sinner that God can't save me". No! Jesus did not come to save "the righteous, but to call sinners to repentance". If we had to contribute to our salvation, no one could ever be sure if they were saved. You never need to wonder if you've done enough. You need never despair. Jesus paid it all! God says, "I will" I will, I will! I will do it! There is no sin so great that the grace of God cannot cover it. "Where sin abounds" Paul says, "grace much more abounds" (**Romans 5:20**). There is no human being, no matter how good he is in his own eyes, that can merit salvation. And no person regardless of bad he is in his own eyes ought ever despair, because God's grace is greater than all our sin!

IV. **God easily accomplishes all that is necessary for to give us a new heart.** What the new birth requires is **impossible**, if man were left to himself. The reception of the Gospel is affected by God's Spirit. **Fifteen** times in this text of Ezekiel, God says either "I do" or "I will" do something. God has not left us alone.

- "I do not this for your sakes" (22)
- "I will sanctify my great name" (23)
- "For I will take you from among the heathen" (24)
- [I will] "gather you out of all countries" (24)
- I "will bring you into your own land" (24)
- "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean" (25)
- "from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you" (25)
- "A new heart also will I give you" (26)
- "a new spirit will I put within you" (26)
- "I will give you an heart of flesh" (26)
- "I will put my spirit within" (26)
- [I will] "cause you to walk in my statutes" (27)
- "I will be your God" (28)
- "Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord GOD..." (32)

Here is the grace of the Gospel: God has not left man to himself. God has done what we could not ever do for ourselves. God says over and over again, "I do this thing" I do it not for you, but I will, I will, I will, I will do all these things, and I do it for my name's sake.

God is the initiator of grace. God says over and over again, "I will", "I will". This is not some offer from God for man to evaluate. This is God telling us what He Himself is going to do. And it has nothing to do with man, but it has to do with His glory! The

Lord first moves. Otherwise there would be no moving to Him. "Before I sought Him, He sought me!" "Salvation is of the Lord". He is the "Author and Finisher of our faith". Christ leaves the ninety and nine, and he goes out searching for that lost sheep! The Lord sought us.

God says: "**I do not *this* for your sakes... but for mine holy name's sake**" (22). This is not attractive to sinners. Grace is offensive to the natural man.

We can declare the Gospel with certainty and confidence, because God never fails in His objectives. **John 6:44**, Jesus says, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day." This is no "maybe Gospel". No, what God has determined will be accomplished. And God can easily give someone a new heart.

V. Finally I want us to see how God gives us the new heart.

A. **First He sends His Spirit in RECONCILIATION**: How does God bring us the new heart? He first brings our sins to the surface so that He can cleanse them. He does this by His Spirit. **Verse 25**, "Then **will I** sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, **will I** cleanse you."

Explanation: This imagery is referring to the cleansing and baptism rituals of the Old Testament. If you were unclean in any way you were separated from the presence of God. You could not go to the Temple. You were separated until you could go to the priests and give the right sacrifice or have the right ceremonial cleansing. There were many things that made a person unclean. If you touched a dead body you were unclean. If you had some disease you were unclean. It was all symbolic of our spiritual defilement. We are all unclean spiritually in God's sight, and without Christ, we would all be separated from God.

The Bible is clear that our sin separates us from God and makes us God's enemies. **Ephesians 4** says we are "alienated from the life of God". It is our filthiness and our idols that offend God. We could never enter into God's presence as a sinner, because sin is a repulsion to God. God must make us a saint.

This cleansing is referred to by Jesus in **John 3:5**, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." I love this picture. A person must be cleansed with water and of the Spirit, or it could be translated, *even of the Spirit*. Listen to what Ezekiel says in **verse 25**, "Then **will I** sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, **will I** cleanse you." What this is, is the cleansing of the Spirit of God.

Do you know the best thing that God could do for a person is to make them see their sin? The Spirit of God convicts of "sin, righteousness, and judgment" (**John 16:8**). The Spirit's work is one of cleansing. He brings draws out the sin and shows it to you so that he can sprinkle you with His cleansing power.

There is a distance between us and God because of our filthiness and idols and sin. Our efforts cannot bridge the separation between us and God. But what God has done in the sending of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is to give us a bridge to Him. There is a bridge, a way of access to God.

- B. God gives us supernatural PERCEPTION in the new heart. You'll know you have it because God gives you a whole new outlook. **Verse 26**, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh".

Explanation: The "heart" in Scripture refers to the seat of man's mind, emotions, and will. When a person is born again, they now can perceive God in all they do. Without this perception they are dead and stony in their heart.

Think of a rock. You can understand that it's cold, lifeless, stubborn, and unmoldable. Lost man is like that. He has no life!

1. No life means no **perception**. When death comes all sensory perceptions are gone. A strawberry pie with whipped cream will not stir the appetite of one who has no life. They cannot enjoy it. When you're dead you lose all sensory perception.

- The dead can't see.
- The dead cannot hear.
- They cannot talk.
- They cannot taste
- They cannot think or talk or perceive anything!

1 Corinthians 2:14. "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned."

2. No life means no **response**. If you cannot perceive something, you will never respond. No spiritual life means no response. The Bible is irrelevant to spiritually dead people. They have no way to respond to it apart from the grace of God. If you come upon a dead dog, you can call the dog all day long, but he cannot respond. He's dead. You do not expect any response from the dead. That would be eerie and strange. Why? Because it would defy all the laws of nature and normality. Something is severely confused and strange if you start talking to the dead. There is no life.

3. No life means no **function**. When we die, our heart stops pumping. The blood stops flowing.

- (1.) That which is alive is soft...
- (2.) Warm
- (3.) Pliable, flexible, and functioning
- (4.) There is movement
- (5.) There is growth
- (6.) To see something living is exhilarating because it's alive. There's something happening. There's movement and ability and agility and possibility. Possibility and ability and agility cease when life ceases. Functioning stops.
- (7.) That which is dead can't move
- (8.) When life ceases, the heart stops, and the muscles begin to harden.
- (9.) Ability and agility ends. The body is no longer flexible.

But when God give man the new heart, he is alive. He gives "an heart of flesh". This is a heart that is alive and fleshy and can respond to God. This new heart is sensitive to God and hungry for God. The new heart can perceive God and respond to God and function for God!

If you've got a new heart you don't have to listen to sin any more, you have to listen to the Lord. He's made you alive. You can now hear His voice. Jesus says in **John 10:27**, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." Listen to God's voice.

- C. **He gives us SANCTIFICATION in the new heart.** Look at verses 26-27, "A new heart also **will I** give you, and a new spirit **will I** put within you: and **I will** take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and **I will** give you an heart of flesh. 27 And **I will** put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do *them*".

This is the key to it all. God does something in us, to guarantee a radical change of life. If you change the heart, you change the life.

Nature can only produce its own kind. A banana stalk can produce only bananas. Grapevines can produce only grapes. And unregenerate hearts can only produced actions that fall short of the glory of God. A person can only begin to produce good fruit when they are given a good heart in regeneration.

Matthew 7:16-18, "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? 17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither *can* a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit."

- D. Of course the end of this chapter, Christ brings us to judgment day, and our fruits make us known. All those who enter in to heaven have done the will of the Father. The new heart always results in obedience. God says, "**I will** give you an heart of flesh. 27 And **I will** put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do *them*" (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

Conclusion: Adam, and thereby all mankind, fell into sin and ceased following Him. After Adam, we are all born following our own way (Ephesians 2:1-3). But God has chosen to call us back to Himself. Through redemption in Christ, God is now in the business of not only converting our hearts but also conforming us "to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29). The Great Commission compels us not only to evangelize people with the message of Christ's death in our place and resurrection; indeed, we are to make actual *followers* of Christ from every nation.

God makes us followers by changing our affections and desires—by giving us a new heart that perceives Him and loves Him.

Praise God that He promises us a new heart!