

A NEW HEART, A NEW SPIRIT, A NEW LIFE

Ezekiel 36:16-37:28

Key Verse: 36:26-27, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”

As we learned in our first sermon on Ezekiel, Ezekiel was in exile in Babylon with many fellow Israelites (1:1). Ezekiel saw a vision of the glory of the LORD leaving the temple in Jerusalem, due to the wickedness of God’s people there (Ch.10). God appointed Ezekiel as a watchman to warn his people, and to turn them back to God in repentance. Those who repented would live; those who continued in sin would die (Ch.18). God would also judge the wicked oppressive nations surrounding them (Ch.25-32). God foretold that Jerusalem would fall, and it was destroyed in 586 B.C. A man who escaped the destruction came and told Ezekiel the news: “The city has fallen!” (33:21) Things looked hopeless for God’s people. But from chapter 34, God gives his devastated people promises and hope of restoration. God would come and shepherd his people, by sending a Shepherd-King, like David (Ch.34). God would again rebuild the nation and make it prosperous and fruitful (36:8-12).

Today’s passage has 3 parts: (1) the LORD’s concern for his holy name (36:16-23), (2) a new heart and a new life (36:24-37:14), and (3) one people under one Shepherd-King (37:15-28). Especially, let’s hear and accept God’s promise and desire to give his people a new heart, a new spirit and a new life.

First, the LORD’s concern for his holy name (36:16-23). Look at verses 16-19. God said that Israel defiled their land because of their violence and their idols. God dispersed and scattered them among the nations. God judged them for their conduct. In verses 20-21 God said through the prophet, “And wherever they went among the nations they profaned my holy name, for it was said of them, ‘These are the LORD’s people, and yet they had to leave his land.’ I had concern for my holy name, which the people of Israel profaned among the nations where they had gone.” In a word, the Israelites made the LORD God look bad by their lifestyles. They called themselves God’s people, but their lives did not show it. So people got a bad impression of the God of Israel because of their conduct.

So what was God’s word to them? See verses 22-23: “Therefore say to the Israelites, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake, people of Israel, that I am

going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I am proved holy through you before their eyes.”

The name of the LORD is holy. The name of the LORD God is to be revered. The LORD’s name is not to be misused or misrepresented. One of the Ten Commandments says, “You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name” (Ex 20:7).

Jesus also taught his disciples and us to revere God’s name in the Lord’s prayer: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed [or, revered] be your name.” This is why we should not use God’s name in vain as a swear word. And we should be very careful how our lives are reflecting our faith and trust in God. You who call yourself “Christian”: does your life reflect the person and the character of Jesus Christ? When we recognize that our lives or our words or even our thoughts do not reflect the holiness, goodness and righteousness of the LORD, that is the time we need to confess it to God, and turn from that thought, word or behavior in humble repentance.

Second, a new heart and a new life (36:24-37:14).

So what would God do to show that his name is holy among the nations? We would expect that God would punish them. Actually God already punished them with exile in Babylon, and the destruction of Jerusalem. What else should God do? Should God destroy them from the face of the earth? I think if any of us were God, we would do that. But thank God that you and I are not God. Listen to all the amazing things that God said he would do for his people in verses 24-28. Note what God said he will do:

“For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. ²⁸ Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God.”

And that was not all. There’s more that God promised he will do. See verses 29-32.

“I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will call for the grain and make it plentiful and will not bring famine upon you. ³⁰ I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops of the field, so that you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations because of

famine. ³¹ Then you will remember your evil ways and wicked deeds, and you will loathe yourselves for your sins and detestable practices. ³² I want you to know that I am not doing this for your sake, declares the Sovereign LORD. Be ashamed and disgraced for your conduct, people of Israel!"

God would do all this for the sake of his holy name. God is so great. God is so merciful. Sometimes God is glorified in his judgments. Other times God is glorified in his mercies. In any case, at all times and in all places, God is to be glorified. Great is the LORD, and most worthy of praise!

It is significant to note what God wants to do for his people, that is, what God desires for his people. God says in verse 25, "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols." God wants to cleanse us of our sins and make us new creations. He says again in verse 26, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." Do you ever feel that you need a new heart or a new spirit?

We can take a bath to clean our bodies. But how can we clean our hearts and our souls? David prayed in Psalm 51:10, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." Then how can we get a new heart and a new spirit?

Look again at verse 27. "And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws." The greatest transformational blessing anyone can receive is to receive God's Spirit in them. How is this possible? How can one receive the Holy Spirit? What causes the Holy Spirit to come and dwell in a person? Apostle Peter explains how in Acts 2:38: "Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit comes to those who repent of their sins and commit their hearts and lives to Jesus Christ. Again, Apostle Peter said in Acts 3:19, "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord..." Forgiveness of sin and refreshing comes through Jesus Christ when a sinner puts his or her faith and trust in Christ, and commits their life to him as their King and Savior. Do you have the assurance that your sins have been forgiven and that the Holy Spirit dwells in you? Have you received Jesus Christ as your Savior and King? Are you living for him? Can you say you are living for Jesus Christ, and not for money, or recognition, or your own pleasure?

Jessica Long was born in Russia to a 16 year old mother and was put up for adoption. She was born with legs below her knees. A Christian couple in Baltimore adopted her. Jessica didn't believe God loved her because of her deformity. But she found meaning

in competing as a swimmer. She won her first gold medal in the Para-olympic games at age 12. She broke 18 world records. Her worth and identity were swimming. But she felt broken and sad a lot. She had an eating disorder and felt no control over her life. Finally, at a Friday night youth group she gave her whole heart to God. For the first time, she felt she was actually a part of God's family. Later she visited her birth mother in Russia and could forgive her from her heart since God had forgive her for all her sins. Jessica knows she can't get through life on her own. She needs God and God is with her. God gave her a new heart. (Her story is at iamsecond.com.)

The prophet Ezekiel was shown in another way in another vision about this new life that God wanted to give his people. Chapter 37 describes a valley of dry bones that the LORD showed him. They were bones of slain people, like bones of an army cut down and left in battle, with no proper burial. The LORD asked Ezekiel, "Son of man, can these bones live?" Humanly, it didn't look like it. But Ezekiel replied, "Sovereign LORD, you alone know." Then the LORD said to Ezekiel, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! ⁵ This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. ⁶ I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'"

Do you know the song based on this Bible passage? It's called Dry Bones. "The foot bone connected to the ankle bone, the ankle bone connected to the shin bone, the shin bone connected to the knee bone. Now hear the word of the LORD!" Christian singer Lauren Daigle also has a song, "We call out to dry bones, "Come alive! Come, alive!" We call out to dead hearts: 'Come alive! Come alive!' Up out of the ashes, let us see an army rise! We call out to dry bones, come alive!"

So Ezekiel prophesied as the LORD commanded him, and the dry bones came together. Skeletons were reconstructed and flesh and skin appeared on them. But there was still no breath in them. So God told Ezekiel, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" So Ezekiel prophesied as he was commanded. Breath entered them and they stood up on their feet, a vast army. The word of Ezekiel was the word of the LORD. The word of the LORD is mighty. The word of the LORD gives life to the dead.

Here we learn that God is the giver of life. God gives life to the dead, and calls things that are not as though they were. We are reminded of the first man Adam. God formed him from the dust of the ground and breathed into him the breath of life, and Adam became a living being. What was the meaning of this vision given to Ezekiel?

Thankfully, the LORD explained it to Ezekiel in verses 11-14:

The LORD said: "Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' ¹² Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³ Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. ¹⁴ I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.'"

Israel was without hope. They looked and felt dead. They felt cut off from God because of their sins and because of God's punishment upon them. But God said he would bring them back to life again. He would bring them back to Israel. He would give them a new life, a new start, along with their new heart and new spirit. God would put his Spirit in them, and they would live. God is the giver of new life.

What does this mean for us? Sin makes us like the walking dead. We are physically alive. But because of sin we are spiritually dead. In our sins, we are cut off from God. Cut off from true life. Apostle Paul said we, apart from Christ, are all dead in our sins and transgressions. But God made us alive with Christ. Through Jesus Christ, we have new life. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Jesus is the way and the truth and the life. Jesus is the Vine. We are the branches. Apart from Jesus, we can do nothing. Apart from Jesus, we are dead. Praise be to God who has given us new life through Jesus Christ our Lord!

These days the world is ravaged by the corona virus. Hundreds, even thousands of people are dying every day. We are surrounded by the shadow of death. But we do not need to be afraid or hopeless. We should not fear death. Why not? Because we have eternal life already in Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus said in John 5:24, "Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life."

Sean Lowe was featured on the show "The Bachelor" to propose to one woman of many candidates. When asked about his sex life before proposing to one woman, he said he was waiting for marriage to have sex. This caused many jokes to be said about Sean. Sean said that he did not have sex in college but messed up afterwards. Then he repented and decided before God to live a new life of waiting for sex in marriage, since he is a Christian. In 17 seasons of the show, Sean Lowe is the only man to actually marry the woman he proposed to on the show. (His story is at iamsecond.com.)

Third, one people under one Shepherd-King (37:15-28). The LORD then had the prophet Ezekiel act out a prophecy regarding two sticks, one named Judah and the

other Joseph. These two sticks represented the southern and northern kingdoms in Israel. Both had been decimated by powerful enemies. God told Ezekiel to make them into one stick in his hand. Then God told him the meaning of it: "I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. ²² I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms. ²³ They will no longer defile themselves with their idols and vile images or with any of their offenses, for I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them. They will be my people, and I will be their God."

God also promised them one shepherd-king in verses 24-25: "My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees. ²⁵ They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your ancestors lived. They and their children and their children's children will live there forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever."

So who is this Shepherd-King, known as David? Many Jewish and Christian scholars believe this to be a reference to the Messiah, descended from David. Jesus said in John 10, the Good Shepherd chapter, that he had other sheep that he would bring together and make them one. Jesus said, "And there shall be one flock and one shepherd" (Jn 10:16). Jesus is our Good Shepherd, who laid down his life for his sheep. God brings people together and makes them one in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ destroys the hostilities between people. Jesus dissolves the hatred with his love, mercy and forgiveness. Jesus dissolves the blaming and finger-pointing.

God also promised to dwell with them in his sanctuary in verses 26-28.

"I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever. ²⁷ My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. ²⁸ Then the nations will know that I the LORD make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever." This promise is expanded in the rest of Ezekiel in the vision of a new temple. The third sermon on Ezekiel in this series will talk more about that.

One young man in our ministry felt washed up and hopeless due to his past sins. He couldn't keep a job. But when he decided not to live to survive but to serve the LORD, his heart was changed. He began to serve others with God's word and prayer. His life was transformed. He is now a blessing to many people. He testifies that God gave him new life.

Today we heard God's desire for his people: to give us a new heart and a new spirit; to put his Spirit in us that we may live; to bring us together as one people under one Shepherd-King. Thanks be to God for Jesus Christ who makes all this possible. Jesus is our Shepherd-King. Jesus is the giver of the Holy Spirit. Jesus brings the dead to life. Jesus changes our hearts by his grace, love and mercy. Thank you Jesus. We repent our sins and accept you as our King and Shepherd. Lord, cleanse our sins and give us continually the spirit of repentance to turn from sin and accept you as our King and Shepherd. Change our hearts by your word, grace and Spirit. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.