

New Heart

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 February 2020

Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 00] If you'd like to turn to the book of Ezekiel, if you start roughly in the middle where Psalms and Proverbs are and you keep turning right, get to Isaiah, keep turning past Isaiah, you'll get to Ezekiel.

And the passage that we're going to read this morning may sound familiar as though it's coming from perhaps Jeremiah or another part of Ezekiel because they're quite famous words in many ways.

They're easily remembered once you've heard them. So Ezekiel chapter 11, page 845 in my Bible. Well, we're going to read a few verses from 19 through to 21.

And this is, if I can just set it in its context a minute, God is speaking to his own people about what God is going to do in the future with his own people and that could include people like us this morning.

But then also people who are not his. You don't get to understand that until you get into the latter part of the book and the rest of the Old Testament that salvation was not just for God's people alone, you know, the nation of Israel, but it was for men, women, boys and girls in any country, in any part of the world that God was, you know, God's plan was bigger than just the nation of Israel.

[1 : 49] And so this is how these words fit. So verse 19, now here, God's word. And I will give them one heart and a new spirit I will put within them.

I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them.

And they shall be my people and I will be their God. But as for those whose heart goes after their detestable things and their abominations, I will bring their deeds upon their own heads, declares the Lord.

If I can just draw your attention, I know we're going to come back to this, but just in the reading, draw your attention to that very key statement that wraps it all up, that there is nothing better for God to look at you and call you his.

There's absolutely nothing better than to hear those words from God that you are his and forever his. And there is nothing better for you to be able to sit there and say, I know that God, you're my God.

[3 : 08] And that's not to say that God isn't the God of the whole world, but it is to indicate that you belong, not just know about him, but belong.

So we're going to come back to these words and the message upon them after this next hymn. Amen.

Amen. Well, if you can open your Bibles again to Ezekiel 11, although there's only a few verses there, it's still worth having our Bibles open, eyes down at the text, and then making our way through it.

So a couple of weeks ago, a few weeks ago, we began looking at what it is to be a Christian and what it is for someone else to become a Christian.

So the whole focus this morning and the Sunday mornings ahead of us is on this idea or the very truth of belonging to God through Christ Jesus, being Christian.

[4 : 36] What does it mean to be a Christian? Now, the reason for such a series, in many ways, is to do two things. I'm not assuming that you're not Christians.

I'm not assuming that you are. I'm making no assumptions at all. But what I am saying is that as you listen to the Word of God, the Word of God will resonate with your own heart.

And when that happens, you're left with an assurance that no person can actually give you. I've often found that one of the biggest sins that actually gets in the way of assurance for believers is the sin that they're committing right now.

That sometimes believers can think of all the things that they've done in their past and they can't quite get over it themselves. And yet God has clearly stated that He has forgiven you.

And the sin you're committing right now is not believing God. And when you don't believe God, that lack of faith just destroys your assurance that you actually belong to Him.

[5 : 57] And so there are sins in the past that can be repentative and Christ Jesus can cleanse you from every single one of them. But often the thing that causes you to lose your assurance and think of the bad things is the sin that you're committing right now and that is not believing that God has actually done that for you in Christ Jesus.

And I've often found that we're speaking with lots of people over the years that that is one of the biggest sins that people don't even realize that they're committing. The failure to believe what God has said that He has done for you, that He has accomplished for you.

They don't look at it as a sin. They look at it as perhaps a personal weakness or I'm just doubting at the minute or I'm just down. No, it's a sin. You're failing to believe in faith what God has said that He has accomplished.

Repent of it. Repent of your unbelief and believe that what God has done for you in Christ Jesus, He has done for you in Christ Jesus. And live in the assurance that that brings.

Now, only you can do that. I can tell you and I've told you, but only you can do that. The other thing that any gospel message does, as it does here with God's people, you'll notice that God is saying that I will give them a new heart.

[7 : 26] I will remove from them a heart of stone. I'll give them a new one. And then I will call them my people and they will call me, they will call me their God. And you want to stop and ask the question, well, were they not before?

Who were they before if they were not that? And it's a very simple thing that God's people have historically, the nation of Israel, believed that they belonged to God when they actually didn't.

Jesus even points to several instances in the New Testament through the conversations. People who call Him Lord, Lord, and they don't actually belong.

It's always much easier to serve Jesus than it is to follow Him. It's always much easier to do something for Jesus than it is to follow Him.

Following Him can be difficult at times. And so whenever there is a message that sort of comes to God's people like this, where He's saying, I'm going to give you a new heart, and in that day I will call you my people, people are going to sit back and listen to that and go, well, what was I before if I wasn't yours?

[8 : 42] And God is addressing people's assumptions. And there's many people in the world that believe that they're good enough to go to heaven.

Well, that's a form of believing that you belong when you don't actually. And that really has to be addressed because it's such a dangerous assumption because it never causes people to turn to God and repent of their sin seriously.

They already believe that they're there only to find out that they're not. Think about it this way. Imagine a person who is lost.

Well, just before they're lost, they don't think that they're lost. You can imagine it in a slightly different way where you're walking through a certain part of town or a certain part of the countryside expecting that you're going in the right direction and that you're going to end up in this place.

Someone has told you it's going to take 20 minutes, and after 20 minutes, you've looked at your watch, and you're still not where you thought you would be. And at that point, the idea of you being lost sets in.

[9 : 52] But right up to that point, you always thought you were going in the right direction. Right up to the point where the realization that you are lost sets in, the fact that you think you're already there, found you're okay, just seems to be the basic belief.

And the point here is entirely the case that it is possible for a person to believe, like God's people do, that they belong when actually they don't, that they're found when actually that they're lost, that they think they're going in the right direction, because it's only when you end up in the place where you didn't think you were going to be that you realize that you're lost.

Many, many people climb a ladder through this world of good works and stuff like that, thinking that they're going to get to God, only to find out that when they've got to the top of it, it was leaning against the wrong wall.

All that work for nothing. And none of that is the gospel. None of that is even close to the gospel. And so we need to be absolutely sure about what it is to be a Christian, how God makes Christians, so that we don't fall into the trap of trying to convince people to become Christians in ways that's not Christian, or to think that we can change people without God doing his supernatural work.

We just can't do any of that. So I want you to be assured that you're saved, and I want you to be concerned, at least jog you enough to think, well, am I?

[11 : 42] Do I really belong? But how can I do both at the same time? Listen, I don't want to cast doubt on your faith, but I want you to ask yourself the serious question, am I a Christian in the same way the Bible describes a Christian?

Am I a Christian in the same way the Bible describes a Christian? And that's not to say that you're not going to have failings, or you're not going to commit sin, or you're not going to have problems, or you're not perfect like you think you ought to be.

All of those things are still going to be true of a Christian. But this, what we're talking of this morning, is really to do with a matter of the heart and the direction of your life.

What do you seek and what do you desire? Is it God? Is it faithful living? These are the things that will indicate to you that you belong to him. They are the very fingerprints of God on your own life, that God has begun a good work in you, and that God will complete that good work in you.

Well, here's the summary, then, of what we have. And if I can just start by saying this, that many people who simply change a belief need to understand that changing a belief is not the same as having a change of heart.

[13 : 07] They're two different things. And many people who believe, for instance, that when they die, that they have been good enough for God to accept them into his presence need to recognize also that that's not the gospel.

And so as we read these words, what we're reading is what God does to make a person his, and what that person looks like when God has given him, her, a new heart.

So what we see is that God changes a person by giving them a new heart. Before they have a new heart, they have a heart of stone, a heart that doesn't necessarily desire God or want to obey God, who wants to follow God.

They have none of that. But God promises to give these people a new heart and put a new spirit within them, and he will remove from them the heart of stone. And by giving them a new heart, these new people with new hearts will then be enabled to live obedient lives.

They will keep his rules, verse 20. They will walk in his statutes. They will obey all of them. Now, no person can do that without a new heart.

[14 : 25] And God knows that a person cannot do that without a new heart. And if he wants that out of a person, then God has to give a person a new heart to get that from them.

And so God enables you to live faithfully by giving you everything that you need to live faithfully. And in short, Ezekiel calls it a new heart.

Removing the old one and giving you a new one. And when you have that new heart, you desire God. That internal motivation to love him, to please him, to walk in his way, is not difficult.

There are difficulties. But the motivation is always there. The desire is always there. And even though sometimes it can be extremely difficult to follow God, the desire to still follow remains strong.

That's what God gives you. That though this is, the Christian life is a hard life, the desire to continue is something that God gives you.

[15 : 33] On the other hand, verse 21, that those whose hearts turn from God to detestable things, those people who don't listen to God's word or spend any time devoting themselves to God in that way, then God will bring their own deeds upon their own head.

In fact, Romans 1 teaches us that one of the ways that a person can be under the wrath of God in this current age is by God letting them do what they want to do.

Not disciplining them for it. Not pulling them up. Not even telling them that they're going in the wrong direction. One of the ways that a person can experience being under the wrath of God, though they may not know it, is by God just letting them do what they want to do.

There's nothing worse than for that to happen. So we begin then with a new heart. And before we can consider what a new heart actually does for us, we have to consider what the heart means within scripture.

And the heart is always the very center of a person. It's what directs their choices, their decisions, their will, their desires. Your heart is what determines your life.

[16 : 56] Your life is the outcome of your heart. The direction of your life, the choices that you have made, the commitments that you are committed to, the convictions that you have, all of that comes out of your heart.

It doesn't come from the world. It comes directly out of your heart. And verse 21 clearly teaches us that at the end of the day, when God makes his judgment about us, he makes his judgment about us by considering our heart.

Because everything comes out of the heart, he doesn't need to look at our actions because our actions are simply an extension of our heart. He doesn't need to look at our words because our words are simply an extension of what's in our heart.

He doesn't need to look at anything else other than our heart because everything else is just an extension, an outcome, an overflow, the fruit of what is in our heart.

So when God judges a person justly in that final day, he will judge them according to their heart. And so if God has given you a new heart, that is how we know we can face the judgment in absolute peace.

[18 : 11] Because God has given us something that he will not judge. He's given us something that will enable us to walk in his way. God will justly judge every single person.

But the reason why Christians escape the condemnation is because we are no longer condemned, but we have been set free in Christ Jesus, having been given a brand new heart.

There's nothing more that I want for all of my family members than for them to have a new heart. As I look at my brother, brothers, and as I look at my brother's children, you can become really, really sad.

That though they have nice lives, nice houses, nice clothes, nice cars, plenty of food, and they live in Cornwall, the jealousy can set in.

But at the end of the day, they don't have new hearts. And my heart for them being saved will be determined on how much I pray for them, whether or not I fast, whether or not, what do I do to plead before God to give them new hearts.

[19 : 42] And then I recognize that sometimes my own heart isn't that clean. That my own heart doesn't desire God quite as much as I thought it was. And I have to wrestle with God over my own heart.

Everything is an extension of your heart. So God's people cannot help, or any person that is, cannot help but be directed by what is in their heart.

And the reason God gives a person a new heart is so that they would be directed by walking in his ways, in his statutes, by keeping his rules and obeying him.

I can obey God without a new heart. I cannot follow Jesus without a new heart. I cannot repent of my sin without a new heart. I cannot do anything that pleases or honors God.

I cannot be a Christian without a new heart. The whole of my life will be directed by whether or not I have a new heart. And in verse 21, it is the heart of the person that leads a person away from God.

[20 : 50] It leads them into the things that they want to do that just pleases themselves. And Jesus addresses this in a slightly different way in Matthew, but you'll know the verse.

Where Jesus is telling his disciples that wherever your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Now what Jesus does cleverly, because he's Jesus, is that he reverses the condition so that you can clearly understand that what you actually follow through life, that the direction of your life actually takes, is whatever treasure is in your heart.

You are directed by your heart, but you are directed by the treasure that is in your heart. The thing that you cherish the most, the thing that you love the most, the thing that you are devoted to the most.

And sometimes it's very difficult for a person to understand what they are actually committed to until you ask them, what is the one thing you don't want to lose? And if the answer is not Jesus, then the answer is that Jesus is not the treasure of your heart.

If the answer was, I don't want to lose my job, or I don't want to lose this, or I don't want to lose that, that is the actual treasure. That is the thing that you pine for, the thing that you want to keep.

[22 : 13] So sometimes we can think that our heart treasures Jesus, or the treasure of our heart is Jesus. When actually, when we're asked the question, what is the worst thing that could ever happen to you, the worst thing that you could lose, and you don't come up with Jesus, then suddenly you begin to realize that your heart isn't where you thought it was.

It's somewhere else. And that's what God is doing with his people all the time. That's what Jesus does, that wherever your treasure is, there your heart will be also. That's what you'll run after.

That is what you will be directed by. It'll occupy your commitments. It'll show you what your devotions are. It'll show you what you love, your convictions, what you do and what you don't do.

And in Proverbs 4, we're told to train our children in such a way where they are to guard their hearts, because if they don't, their lives will be directed in ways that you don't want them to go.

One of the key pieces of training that a child must go through before they're sort of 15 or even before that is to learn how to guard their heart. Parents and adults have to do the same.

[23 : 27] If you don't guard your heart, it'll lead you astray. So even for a Christian, even for a person who is committed to God and belongs to God, you still have to guard it.

You have to guard what it truly treasures and don't allow other things to creep in as though it's allowed space in there. That you won't mind me being here, will you?

You know, that's what other commitments say. You won't mind me being here. I'm not really taking up that much time. I'm not really taking up that much space. And then your heart goes into this internal dialogue.

Well, I could use that time for prayer. Yeah, but... I could use that time for studying God's word. Yeah, but I don't do it anyway. So because I don't pray that often anyway, because I don't study your word too much anyway, I have free space.

I have free time. No, you're not guarding your heart. You've not guarded your heart. And by not guarding your heart, you are then directed away from a stronger commitment to the Lord.

[24 : 34] And it's so easy for other people to see because our commitments are an extension of our heart. Our devotions are an extension of our heart.

Prayer is an extension of our heart. Because out of the heart comes the directions and commitments that we make. So the idea that we can even convince ourselves or convince other people in the church that we are a strong, faithful Christian walking in the ways of the Lord, when the outward appearance shows the opposite, the outward appearance is a mirror of your own heart.

It lets everybody know what's in there. And that's what God is getting at here. That's what Jesus is saying when he is saying that where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

And so for any person to go through any real kind of change, they must have a new heart because the heart directs everything. But sometimes people decide that they'll try other things before they come to God.

Some people believe that mankind's greatest problem is ignorance. That if I only have more information, that if I only know more, then I can change the course of my life.

[25 : 59] That is so ignorant. It is unbelievable. No amount of information can change the course of a life because it's not what goes on in your head as such.

It's what goes on in your heart. Your heart has already taught you to consider that information is what you need.

It's not what you need. It's God. Some people believe that if they only have the right kind of information or if somebody just gives them the right kind of direction that they're then able to walk in it.

No, you can't do that either because it has to be an extension of your heart, not an extension of someone else's teaching, not an extension of even the pastor's teaching, even everything that I'm saying here this morning can tell you how you will be directed by your heart, but I cannot direct your heart.

Some people believe that changes will simply come in a method. I've been in the church ministry for over 19 years and the amount of times that I've heard Christians say, if we only did this or we did that, if we put this on, if we did that, we'll be able to change people.

[27 : 20] They'll come out, they'll be more committed. None of it comes down to methods. None of it comes down to plans and meetings. It only comes down to a new heart.

Pastors don't have to convince Christians to evangelize when they have hearts to evangelize. Pastors don't have to convince anybody to walk in the ways of God who has a heart to walk in the ways of God.

God doesn't sit his people down and say, look, you're not following my laws. You're not living the way that I want you to. You're not walking in my statutes.

You're not keeping my rules or living faithfully. He doesn't sit them down and give them a sermon. He tells them that they need a new heart. I've learned for a long time that Christians cannot be changed by messages.

They can only be changed by the God who's telling them the message. And that's what's kind of happening here, that you must go before God yourself, not before me.

[28 : 32] I'm the least important person at this point. You are the most important person at this point before God, as am I before God personally.

So drop your five-step plan and your two-step program and your classes of this, that, and the other.

God wants you to live faithfully and you need a new heart to do it. And if you have a new heart because you are saved, then you need to learn how to guard that new heart from other things creeping in and robbing that time and attention that only God deserves.

Because out of the heart comes everything else. What about then the change that comes? Well, not only does the new heart address a person's problem between them and God, it also addresses the problems that people have between each other.

that when you fall out with a person, two Christians fall out with one another. That's nothing more than your old heart rubbing up against their old heart.

[29 : 53] It's all that it is. It's all that it is. And now you realize that it's that simple. It's really quite simple to deal with. That we all have parts of our heart that we don't want to guard because it kind of protects us.

Well, I'll just leave that bit open, the bit that can be a bit abrupt, the bit that can be defensive. I need that to protect me. We all do it in different ways, but we all do it.

And so the real issue here is get rid of the old heart. And if God has already got rid of the old heart in you and given you a new one, then Proverbs 4, protect the one that you have, guard it, because it will direct everything.

Every commitment, every conviction, every decision, every choice, every love, every desire, every motivation, everything is going to be an extension of your heart.

So protect the new one that you have or cry out to God for a new one now. That's what we must do. So drop all those plans, drop a change of routine, drop all those things and ask God for this new heart.

[31 : 15] Now when God gives a new heart to you, what he's actually teaching you is the way that you now ought to walk. What you need to love, what you need to do, and God enables you to do it.

He's no longer instruction, but enablement. And this is what we need to understand as Christians, that God is enabling us to live the life that he has actually called us to live.

He's not just telling us to live it, but that he is actually enabling us to live it. He's not telling us to live faithfully, he's enabling us to live faithfully. He's not telling us to walk in his way, but he is enabling us to walk in his way.

He's not telling us to keep his rules, but he is enabling us to keep his rules because we can't. And God knows that simply telling us to do something doesn't mean that it's going to happen.

So he enables it to happen. So the conclusion is this, before we come to the actual conclusion of the exhortation, the conclusion to everything that we have said so far is this, that salvation that God gives changes the whole person because he changes the heart.

[32 : 30] And everything is an extension of the heart. So God changes all of you by giving you a new heart. And the way God changes you is by giving you that new heart through Christ Jesus, that what he accomplishes, he accomplishes for you.

And that God restores everything. He brings everything to the place where it really ought to be. That that impossible life of living faithfully for God is no longer impossible, but possible because God simply hasn't given you instruction, he's given you power.

is giving you ability, he has enabled you to lay down your old life and follow him. None of us gets it perfect, but the motivation is there, the desire is there, the treasure is there to follow it.

This is not, as Wesley once put, an act of sinless perfection. Although Wesley himself never claimed sinless perfection, his followers did. And W.E.

Sangster, in his book on the subject, says that it's very easy to prove that no man has achieved the state of sinless perfection by going and asking his wife.

[33 : 48] She'll tell you the truth. He didn't say the other way around, which I was kind of hoping he did, but no, he just started having a go at the husband.

No one can achieve that point, but everyone desires it. Everyone who has a new heart desires it. We desire to be without sin.

We desire not to have that hardness and we know it's there and we want it to be gone and it takes the course of our life and finally seeing Jesus before it is totally gone.

so the heart is the very seat, the very center of every decision you will make, of every choice you're going to make, of every commitment you're going to make.

Everything is going to be an extension of your heart. It will always be an extension of your heart. It's simply a case of which heart is it? Is it the old heart of stone that will direct your life away from God or is it the new heart that only God can give that will direct your life to him?

[34 : 58] God wants you to live faithfully but he doesn't just tell you to do it, he enables you to do it. And so sometimes it can be tempting for the non-Christian, even for the Christian, to think that the Christian life is somehow a list of do's and don'ts.

We know it's not. We know that it's about following the treasure of our life. The new heart which God gives you will enable you to live the way God wants you to.

And alongside this God makes the very certain promise that you are his and he is yours. Which is another way of saying that when God gives you a new heart he's bringing you into relationship with him.

That God is effectively marrying you, making you his, forever his, keeping you, loving you, loving you, not letting any harm come to you and one day bringing you home fully.

We're in the stage where we have been adopted by God but we've not yet moved into the new home with our new parent. That's how Romans puts it. That God has purchased you in Christ Jesus, he has redeemed you, he has made you his own, he has given you a new heart, he has adopted you and here we are in this world waiting to move into our new parents' home.

[36 : 27] Waiting to move into the father's home. We're waiting for that to happen and one day it will. If we don't understand that this is about a new heart and we only think that Christianity is about new beliefs, then you haven't really understood the difference between changing your mind and changing your heart.

Simply believing new things is just any, that's just a different set of beliefs. Christianity isn't about a different set of beliefs, it's about having a new heart which produces a different set of beliefs but it is possible to have a different set of beliefs without a new heart.

So here's the exhortation as we close. Recognize as you leave this morning that the course of your life from the moment you step out the door will be directed by exactly what's in your heart.

Every decision you make is going to follow the treasure of your heart. Wherever your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

And so God sort of very gently is causing you to consider your ways as a reflection on your own heart. For some, it may be the daunting surprise that you don't have this new heart.

[37 : 58] For others, it could be that you have this new heart but you have left it unguarded for so long. And for others, you recognize the thankfulness that God has changed you to do the things you could not do without it.

My own observation would be this, that I think that the church at large, not just here, but elsewhere, are people where people are genuinely saved but have not guarded their hearts.

They have allowed things to creep in that have pushed aside the treasure of God and become treasures in and of themselves. And it's now time to ask them to leave, to tell them to leave.

Go. Guard the treasure of your heart that God has given you. So the call for you this morning could either be come to Jesus, repent and believe, know that what God has done, he has done for you, that God alone is only the one who is able to give you a new heart and make you right before him, to be able to bring you into relationship with him and keep you in relationship with him.

Or the consideration is for others, no, I have this new heart but I've not taken care of it. I've not guarded it in the way that God has asked me to guard it and therefore I have to repent of that and I have to believe that what God has given me is the treasure, worth treasuring.

[39 : 41] And I recognize that the course of my life does actually come down to what I treasure. It does actually come down to what I do not want to lose. It does actually come down to these things much more than it comes down to what I think or believe.

It actually comes down to what my loves are. love. And so it's not surprising then for God to call his people to love him first above anything else in the world because here we have God with all the knowledge with all the power and with all the authority and yet he doesn't sit his people down with a textbook.

He sits them down to tell them that he will give them a new heart. So if there are any here this morning who don't belong then you need to come to Jesus.

You need to repent of your sin and you need to believe and what you're believing is this that what God has done for you in Christ Jesus is something that you need and your sin is an offense to God and that is something that you have to repent of.

So repent and come and God will enable you to do that and for others who do belong then be assured that you belong but guard your heart.

[41 : 03] So all of you come, come to Jesus. Amen.