

Something New

Stone to Flesh #1

Ezekiel 36:28, 35-36 NIV - 28 Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God. ... 35 They will say, "This land that was laid waste has become like the garden of Eden; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited." 36 Then the nations around you that remain will know that I the LORD have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate. I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it.'

If we have given our lives to Christ, then we are God's representatives to the world around us. When God's Spirit lives in us, our lives will be transformed, and a changed life is the witness of God's goodness.

What are the differences people might notice between behavior modification (self-discipline) and heart transformation? Is there someone you know who represents true heart transformation?

WRAP-UP

New things can be challenging or frightening when we have grown comfortable in our old ways. But God is in the business of transforming lives, and that means we need to be open to change. If we have allowed our hearts to harden against God's word and His commands, we need to seek a new heart. One that is softened by the Spirit of God living in us. With a new heart and spirit our transformed lives will be a witness to the world of the goodness of God.

MEMORY VERSE

Ezekiel 36:26 NIV - 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.

PRAYER (20 MIN)

Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life.

Challenge – Commit Ezekiel 36:26 to memory this week.

INTRODUCTION

In our new sermon series, we examine the promise of God made in Ezekiel to give His people a new heart and a new spirit. What was the context of this promise? Ezekiel was writing from captivity in Babylon. God's people had rejected God's laws and ignored His words and as a result God allowed them to be removed from the promised land and exiled to Babylon. But God is faithful to His people. His plan was to transform them in a way that reflected His holiness by replacing their hardened and rebellious hearts with hearts softened by God's own Spirit. But that required them to set aside what was old and comfortable in exchange for the new and the unknown.

Ice Breaker

Do you have something that is old but so comfortable that you may never part with it?

Key Passage

Ezekiel 36:26 NIV - 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.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Solution to Sin

The bible tells us a consistent story of God's love and His plan for us from Genesis through Revelation. He wants us to dwell with Him in a close and loving relationship. Of course, when we first rejected God's authority and disobeyed in Eden, we forfeited our place in the garden and were exiled from His presence. Sin always separates us from God's presence. Sin had separated Israel from the Promised Land and led them to Babylonian captivity. But God has a solution to sin's corruption.

What had the people of Israel done that angered God according to Zechariah 7:12?

Zechariah 7:12 NLT - 12 They made their hearts as hard as stone, so they could not hear the instructions or the messages that the LORD of Heaven's Armies had sent them by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. That is why the LORD of Heaven's Armies was so angry with them.

Ezekiel 36:25-27 NIV - 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.

Their sin caused God to remove them from the Promised Land, but God did not forget them. What did God do for His people to restore them to the place where they could once again meet with Him (Ezekiel 36:25-27)?

The Spirit of God is what breathed life into Adam. Without God's Spirit we are dead in our sins. In Ezekiel 36:25-27 we see that God gives His people a new spirit which is His Spirit in them. God's Spirit changes our hearts. The heart is not only the seat of emotion, but also the place where our will and decisions are formed.

Luke 4:14, 18 NIV - 14 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. ... 18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free,

In Luke we see that Jesus was filled with the power of the Spirit. What did Jesus declare that the Spirit enabled Him to do?

After Jesus ascended to heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to fill His followers. When God's Spirit resides in our heart, how does that affect us? (Deu 30:6, Gal 5:22-23)

Deuteronomy 30:6 NLT - 6 "The LORD your God will change your heart and the hearts of all your descendants, so that you will love him with all your heart and soul and so you may live!

Galatians 5:22-23 NIV - 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

When our hearts are hard, we refuse to listen to God and obey His laws. The only solution is to remove our hard heart and replace it with a softened heart. And our hearts are softened when God's Spirit dwells in us. We know He lives in us when we desire to follow His word and obey His laws producing the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

2. Returned to the Land

Zechariah 7:13 NLT - 13 "Since they refused to listen when I called to them, I would not listen when they called to me, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies. 14 As with a whirlwind, I scattered them among the distant nations, where they lived as strangers. Their land became so desolate that no one even traveled through it. They turned their pleasant land into a desert."

God had prepared the Promised Land as an inheritance for His people Israel, but when they hardened their hearts and turned away from God there was an impact on the land. What does Zech 7:13 say happened to the land? Have you experienced a time of turning from God, when you found that things which were previously great were now falling apart?

2 Chronicles 36:21 NIV - 21 The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah. Jeremiah 29:10 NIV - 10 This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place.

During the time of the exile to Babylon, God was restoring the land where His people would dwell. He was also recreating Israel so that they could live in the land once again without defiling it. God was preparing a good future for them, and it wasn't to stay in Babylon. It would require them to leave the old comfortable ways for something new.

Share with your group an experience where God called you to exchange the known and comfortable for something new- perhaps a job, a home, or a relationship. What emotions do you recall during that time?

3. The Power of Transformed Lives

The remnant that returned to Israel was a transformed people with a new heart and a new Spirit. They were destined to be witnesses to a faithful God.