

Thy Very Heart: My Heart Healed by His

~Ezekiel 36~

Week one of series, January 31, 2021, Rev. Sam Ferguson

Opening thoughts

*I carried about me a cut and bleeding soul that could not bear to be carried by me. And where could I put it I could not discover. Not in pleasant groves, not in games and singing, nor in the fragrant corners of a garden. Not in the company of a dinner table, nor in the delights of the bed. Not even in my books and poetry. It floundered in a void and fell back upon me. I remained in a haunted spot which gave me no rest from which I could escape. **From where could my heart flee from my heart?***

—St. Augustine, Confessions

Augustine was not seeking introspection; he needed healing for his wayward, tired heart. **He found healing as his heart came into union with God's great heart;** grace from "the God of my heart."

The purpose of this series is that each one of us would take honest, humble stock of our own heart, that "sensitive, passion-filled, capricious, at times recalcitrant, part of the soul."

Is your heart lonely, tired, anxious, angry, hard, cold, or weary?

So, in this time between Epiphany and Lent, we will put our hearts before God's great heart and seek healing.

Imagine sitting next to Jesus. He places his hand over your heart, like a stethoscope, and asks, "How is your heart doing?" Then, with utmost compassion, he takes your hand and places it over his own heart and says, "Because this is how my heart feels."

It is our hearts coming into contact with the heart of God that brings us to the affective **center of the gospel.**

Context of Ezekiel 36

This passage speaks of the events surrounding 586bc, when Babylon took the Israelites into captivity 500 miles from the promised land. The captivity happened because of Israel's sin.

33:26. *You rely on the sword, you commit abominations, and each of you defiles his neighbor's wife; shall you then possess the land?*

The Israelites had presumed upon the Lord's goodness and continually broke the covenant. So God took the leash off Babylon.

23:21. *...a fugitive from Jerusalem came to me and said, "[Jerusalem] has been **struck down**."*

Tragic, but the natural consequence of breaking God's covenant.

The most important question we can ask here is, 'How is God's heart feeling?' God sees the heart of Israel—it is sinful and sick. What will he do?

In **36:22-26**, God declares he will act in mercy and salvation. First, in **vv. 22-24**, he promises the future *external vindication* of his holy name; he will crush Israel's oppressors and return the Israelites to the promised land.

The Israelites might have thought, "Great! God will squash our enemies and bring us back to the land and temple. All will be well!"

Israel's sickness, however, *was inside* of them at the heart-level.

Second, in **vv. 25-26**, God declares that he will give Israel a **new heart** and put a **new spirit** in the people.

The heart's centrality

We often focus on the external problems around us. However, it is our internal world—our hearts—that are the root of everything going wrong.

Have you, or has someone close to you, ever been told that something is deeply wrong inside? (E.g., cancer, depression.) Everything could be made right in the world, but you would still long for *healing inside*.

The human heart spawns evil and wickedness. Redemption will either involve the depths of human beings or it will be no redemption at all.

What does Scripture say happens in our hearts?

- We treasure God's law (various Psalms).
- We have faith (Rom. 10:10).
- We doubt God (Ps. 14:1).

- We love God (Mat. 22:37).
- The Spirit comes to dwell (Eph. 3:17).
- Life flows through it (Prov. 4:23).

How does the Bible define the heart? Certainly more than emotions and feelings. **In the Bible, thinking, feeling, and willing all issue from a person's complex center—the heart**, the place where feelings and thoughts bear upon the will and press one into action.

We are not filing cabinets, with drawers for thinking, feeling, and willing. We are like **soup**—everything mixes and flavors together. (See Mat. 15:19, Luke 6:54, Mat. 5:28).

The heart's condition

v. 26 tells us that we have hearts of “stone” (i.e., deadness, stubbornness). Remember, Israel is an image for humanity at large. This is true of *us*.

We often describe our hearts in terms of brokenness, which has two hues:

- (a) The first hue is **sinfulness**. In **v. 25**, God declares he will cleanse Israel from uncleanness and idols. The heart is defiled by sin and divided by idols. Sin comes into the heart like a pollutant while desires come out of the heart as idolatry.
- (b) The second hue is **frailty**. Our flesh fails (Ps. 73:26), we offer broken and contrite hearts (Ps. 51:17), we become “sore afraid” (1 Sam. 21:12), our hearts are easily troubled (Jhn. 14:1).

Our hearts are simultaneously overtly wicked and pitifully weak.

When God deals with the human heart, he cleanses sinfulness and comforts frailty. Sinful and sick, we need the hands of a compassionate physician.

Healing the heart

In **v. 27**, God declares, “I will put my Spirit within you...” This promise from God anticipates conversion (see the story of Nicodemus in John 3).

This ‘heart-work’ is available to those who put their faith in Jesus.

Remember, God takes the initiative. (***I will*** give you a new heart; ***I will*** remove the heart of stone; ***I will*** put my Spirit within you.) This is very good news; let God's initiative lay over you and comfort you.

In **v. 27**, God promises to put "my Spirit" in his people. **God's spirit irrevocably attaches us to him.** It is profoundly relational.

- (a) Paul tells us that the Spirit of God searches everything, even the depths of God (1 Cor. 2:10).
- (b) Paul tells us that the Spirit of God dwells in us (Rom. 8:9).
- (c) Paul tells us that God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5).

So, in Ezekiel 36:27, when God promises to "put my Spirit within you," he is saying that we need the movements of his heart thrust into the depths of ours. This is God saying, *I'm going to revive your heart by putting my heart straight against it.* This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Application

Take serious stock of your heart this week. Talk and journal about it.

Pray something like this: *Lord, please give me a couple passages from Scripture that reveal your heart. Let the Holy Spirit fill my heart with belief and satisfaction in those truths.*

Book recommendations:

- [*Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers*](#) by Dane C. Ortlund
- [*With All Your Heart: Orienting Your Mind, Desires, and Will toward Christ*](#) by A. Craig Troxel
- [*Confessions*](#) by Augustine ([free pdf version](#))
- [*The Bruised Reed*](#) by Richard Sibbes