

**A Change of Heart**  
**Ezekiel 36:24-28, Acts 2:1-14,36-39**

Brothers and sisters in Christ, imagine for a moment that you are sitting in your doctor's office... You went to see the doctor because you just haven't been feeling well lately.

You described your symptoms, the doctor did a preliminary examination and right away he sent you over to the diagnostics center to do a bunch tests and scans and x-rays.

Now - you are sitting in the examining room trying to process the diagnosis you've just received. You've been told your heart is defective, its weakening, wearing out and won't last much longer. The doctor gives it six months – maybe a year...

What goes through your mind at that point, what are you feeling? Shock, disbelief, as you try to come to grips with the fact that you've just been given an expiration date. You start to think about what this means for the plans and goals you have in life, for the people whom you are responsible for – your family members, children, husband, wife.

You wonder how will you break the news to them? Who will look after them if you are not alive?

I imagine these are the sorts of things that would be running through my mind at such a moment.

And now imagine how you would feel a surge of unexpected hope as the doctor interrupts your thoughts saying *“however if we find a suitable donor, we could give you a new heart!”*

And then the period of waiting would begin – at first it wouldn't be so bad. Although you've received devastating news, there is also hope – so you're buoyed up and positive about the prospects that you can receive a new heart.

But the days go by... the weeks go by... the months go by... and they still have not come across a suitable donor – and your hope starts to sag. You begin to worry if there is a suitable donor - and if they will find them in time, because you don't really know how much time you have left.

Those thoughts and feelings you experienced when you first received the diagnosis start to run through your head again.

Six months pass by, then seven – eight... nine months – you're feeling like you're living on borrowed time now. The stress of the whole situation is placing even more strain upon your already worn out heart and you're trying not to panic.

Then you get the call – a suitable heart has been found! You're going to get a new heart.

You're standing there with the phone - relief flooding over you. You're trying to pay attention to the voice on the other end of the line giving you all the details about the surgery... and the logical part of your brain knows that you're not fully out of the woods yet... But all you can think about in that moment is that you have been given a second chance at life.

Now if you think about it – this is a bit similar to the path we have followed in our Heart of the Matter sermon series over this past month.

Especially as last week's message was like getting the bad news in the doctor's office. We were confronted by the difficult truth that scripture reveals our hearts are treacherous – and we looked at the implications and consequences of that.

However – though the diagnosis was severe, there was also the really really good news that God has promised to give us new hearts! So there was still hope.

Now... this week – this morning, we are getting the phone call - as it were - confirming that a suitable donor has been found! And we're getting the details of what getting a new heart means and what is required of us so that this heart transplant is 100% successful.

Now if you missed the first three sermons in this series – let me give you a quick review of how we've built up to this last message this morning and why receiving a new heart is so important.

It's not just because last week we got the bad news that our and so this week we need to balance it out with good news.

It's because God created and designed our hearts for a specific purpose! And just to be clear, we're not talking about our biological hearts - we're talking about our biblical hearts.

The Heart is the center and core of our being which encompasses our mind, our emotions, our beliefs, our convictions, our desires – all that makes us who we are before God as human beings and gives us our identity.

And God designed the core of who we are to receive His Word – we are to put His words into our hearts and guard them so that we protect the integrity and truth of God's Word.

Because our hearts produce the desires which drive our lives – we're not just rational beings, we're not just emotional beings, we're not just believing beings... rather we are desiring beings. Our thoughts, feelings and beliefs all combine together and form our heart's desires.

And the desires of our hearts direct our actions and choices and the directions of our lives.

This is what God created them to do and THIS is why God wants to give us new hearts – so that the desires of our hearts will direct our actions and choices and the direction of our lives to seek first His Kingdom and live as faithful covenant partners with Him. AMEN?!?

So where did God find a suitable donor for us – for each of us, and all of us?

Well think of it this way – just like medical technology is currently attempting to develop the possibility of growing donor organs from our own cells, God was able to create a new human heart by sending His Word to become incarnate in the conception and birth and life of Jesus Christ.

Remember what John 1:1 says *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all*

*things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.”* (This is referring to the Word in the Creation)

Then John continues in vs 14 *“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son...”*

So God grows a new human heart, from Mary’s humanity and the Word’s Creating Divinity, and by the power of the Holy Spirit – Jesus Christ is born! The Word become Flesh – what better way for the Word of God to become central in the human heart than for God’s Word to become incarnate!

So God has created a suitable donor to give us new hearts - just as He promised He would.

But there are still the mechanics of the actual replacement that need to occur. The old, treacherous heart – the heart of stone - must be taken out, and the new heart - of flesh, living and beating - must be put in. (Ez 36:26)

Heart replacement surgery needs to happen... and we receive Jesus’ new heart in the same way that our new heart was created – or as Jesus explains it *“no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit... You must be born again”* (John 3:5,7)

You would almost think that Jesus had our scripture reading from Ezekiel 36 in mind with those references to water and the Spirit... *“I will sprinkle you with clean water and you will be clean.. I will put my Spirit in you”* - I’m sure he did.

But the point here is that our heart transplant surgery takes place through us being reborn. As Jesus created our new heart by being born of a woman, we receive this new heart of flesh in a similar manner through the rebirth of our spirit by the Holy Spirit. Do you see how that works?

God hints at this in vs. 26-27 in Ez 36 when he says he will put a new spirit in us and then saying He will put His Spirit in us. Our new spirit comes from His Spirit – our new heart comes from being reborn through the Holy Spirit.

So our scripture passage from Ez 36 is like the Dr. saying – there’s hope, you can get a new heart and then Christmas, the birth of Jesus Christ - is when we got the phone call telling us that a suitable donor had been found for us...

And brothers and sister the date for the heart replacement surgery was at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out.

And I have to say that in Ez 36:24-28 God actually promises us new heart – he doesn’t merely inform us it’s possible.

So when we read about Pentecost in Acts 2 this morning, did and you catch the any of the foreshadowing of Pentecost?

In Ez 36:24 God says *“For I will take you out of the nations... and countries and bring you back into your own land.”*

In Acts 2:5 it says *“Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.”* And just in case you were thinking that might be a generalization in vs 9-11 Luke lists them all *“Parthians, Medes and Elamites;*

*residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs”* You see the connection?

Then in Ez 36:26 – as we’ve noted God says he will *“remove their heart of stone.”* In Acts 2:36, after Peter explains what is happening, and proclaims the truth about Jesus to them, Luke notes that these people who gathered from all countries *“were cut to the heart!”* Another connection.

And in Ez 36:25 we read about a cleansing process, God says *“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.”*

In Acts 2:38 the people are instructed to *“Repent and be baptized... in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.”* This reveals how the cleansing happens, more connections...

And finally in Ez 36:27 God promises that there will be a change in obedience, He says *“I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”* In Acts 2:38 the people are promised they *“will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*

And then Luke notes how many people were obedient to repent get baptized and then received the Holy Spirit, the evidence of which is recorded in vs. 42 and following where he describes how *“they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, how they worshiped and praised God in the temple, how they sold possessions to give money to those in need”* Evidence of the Holy Spirit moving them to obedience and holy living.

So you see how these two passages are connected. And what these connections show us is that Pentecost is the event where God fulfills His promise to give His people a new heart.

This is the start of the heart replacement surgery and it has been going on ever since, because in vs. 39 Peter says that the

promise of receiving the Holy Spirit through Baptism is for *“their children, and all who are far off – for ALL whom the Lord God will call.”* It is a continuing event which also includes us!

So what this means is that you are either waiting for your heart transplant surgery, or you’ve already had it... and you need to be reminded to follow the post-op recovery plan.

So how do we know if you’ve received our new heart or if we’re still waiting for it? What is the evidence that will tell us if we are reborn by the Holy Spirit?

Well according to what we read in Ez 36 the preparation for this heart transplant is that we are cleansed from our impurities – *“tum-ah”* in Hebrew, and our idols – *“gill-luleen.”*

Now the NIV translates *“tum-ah”* as *“impurities”* and that’s technically correct but very polite, it’s like calling our lustful desires and actions *“improprieties”* as opposed to describing them as sinful.

The full force of tum-ah is *our filthiness*, which brings to mind what Jesus said in Mark 7 about our hearts producing “*sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.*” (vs. 22)

But if we have received our new heart, then we will have a keen awareness of what is clean and what is filthy – in other words we can identify sin as the scriptures describe it, and more importantly we can identify the all of our own sins.

We may not have committed murder – but we know why Jesus points out that “*anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.*” (Matt 5:22) We may not have committed adultery – but we get what Jesus means when he says “*anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*” (Matt 5:28)

When we are made clean we can recognize what is actually filthy. So do you recognize Sin and do you despise it? And in the same way we can recognize idolatry.

With a new heart we are able to make that fine distinction between appreciating good things versus turning them into god things, and worshiping them instead of the Creator.

And most importantly, as Peter says in Acts 2, we repent and turn to Jesus Christ to receive our forgiveness and cleansing and we have received baptism to assure us that the Holy Spirit has applied Christ’s forgiveness to us.

So that’s a starting point for determining if you have had heart replacement surgery. There are other indicators described in the scriptures, but this is what we find in our passages today.

Now if you are not certain, or you realize that you haven’t received a new heart yet, please come and speak with me afterwards – please. It’s my job to help people understand how to repent, and receive forgiveness in Jesus and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and get that new heart, and to arrange for baptism as a means of grace and assurance.

There’s no reason to wait any longer – it’s a new heart!!!

Now if you know that you've received your new heart because you have been convicted of sin, confessed it and received Jesus' forgiveness and been baptized – great!

Now it's important for to be reminded to follow the post-op recovery and life plan, or as Paul says in Galatians 5:25 *"Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."*

Now brothers and sisters, what does this mean? Well if we look at Ez 36:27 God says His Spirit will move us *"to follow His decrees – "Choq" in Hebrew, and be careful to keep His laws – His "Mishpat."*

So living by the Spirit isn't just doing whatever we want with our second chance at life, like going back to smoking and heavy drinking and a sedentary lifestyle that lead to the need for a biological heart transplant in the first place...

Rather it's following God's decrees, His *"Choq;"* and because this word is very closely related to *"Choqma – wisdom"* we can also deduce that it includes living by wisdom.

And living by the Spirit in Ez 36:27 also means keeping God's Laws – His *"mishpat"* – which is translated elsewhere in scriptures as *"Justice."*

So there is a very earthy and concrete aspect to the post-op recovery plan of living by the Spirit with our new hearts. We are moved to follow God's decrees and wisdom and the Spirit makes us conscientious to keep God's Laws and Justice.

We might very well take Jesus' words in Matt 22:37-40 to summarize all this *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law (decrees) and the Prophets (justice) hang on these two commandments."*

But it's important to understand that while the commands to Love God and neighbor are foundational to the Law and Prophets, this love is not a vague permission notion – rather this love is given expression and defined in the specifics of the Law and Prophets. This is specifically how to show love.



And this is important, imagine how you might feel after you received your biological heart transplant and perhaps for the first time in many years your heart is now functioning properly and every part of your body is now getting the proper flow of blood that it was lacking before...

So with increased blood flow – your hands and fingers are warmer, your brain is thinking better, your white blood cells can move around and fight infection better, your muscles are getting more oxygen, and you are stronger and have more endurance – as well as more desire...

It works the same with our new heart when we are born again.

Every part of our heart gets affected by the presence of the Holy Spirit in us – but the Holy Spirit works with and uses the specific-ness of God’s laws and justice to bring about changes in our thinking, correct our beliefs, point out false teaching, get rid of doubts, increase our perseverance, strengthen our faith – as well as create new desires, and sanctify old ones.

And for our part we co-operate with the Holy Spirit and assist Him when we use the Law to help us specifically act in obedience and faith and harmony with how he is changing us, correcting us, strengthening us and motivating us.

All this requires a very specific and detailed understanding of what Love – what Agape – actually means, and a vague notion of permissive benevolence or indifference is not biblical Love and has no place in our new hearts! Does that make sense?

So you see – if you haven’t received a new heart yet, today is you lucky, or providential, day! We can take care of that.

If you’ve already received your new heart – remember to stick to the post-op plan and live according to the Holy Spirit and co-operate with Him so that you experience ALL the benefits of your new heart. And if you need some encouragement with a specific part of that plan – we can help that as well.

because as Paul says of the Corinthians *“you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with*

*the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.” (2 Cor 3:3)*

May the Holy Spirit empower our new hearts to pump the blood of Jesus into the parts of our lives that are still farthest away from His Lordship.

May the blood of Jesus work its power to take ALL our thoughts captive to Christ, point out even the slightest deviation from the truth, and ignite all of our passions with desire for the Kingdom of God. Amen