

# A Spirit Filled Life: Receiving the New Heart

## Introduction

It's reformation Sunday, and I want to begin with a story. Most will tell of Martin Luther nailing the ninety-five theses to the church door in Wittenberg, unsuspecting that he was going to start a movement that would forever be a turning point in church history. Today, I would like to tell a different Luther story. Once upon a time, there was a German monk named Martin Luther. One day, this monk received a summons to come to Rome to respond to a controversial matter he was involved in. The journey was long, but Luther was going to see some of the most important people in the church that he loved so much.

Upon arrival, Luther found that things were not as they should have been. Those who were supposed to be the guardians of the truth were nothing more than charlatans. The clergy at the top of the Roman church was as corrupt beyond imagination.

There are many factors that led the Catholic Church down this path, but one thing is for certain. These men who were supposed to be the most pious on the planet had not experienced the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is probably the least understood member of the trinity. He's often blamed for weirdness, exploited for financial gain, and on the other hand ignored altogether. We must recognize that despite all the abuses and bad teaching on the Holy Spirit, there is no experience of the Christian faith and spirituality without Him.

Last time I had the opportunity to preach, we examined an overview of the work and person of the Holy Spirit. We want to zoom in a bit and examine His work in more detail. That begins with the work of conversion. **This is the Holy Spirit's transforming work—taking us from polluted to pure, obstinate to obedient, and from sojourner to citizen.**

Pray, read v25-28.

## Context

There is much to say about this section. Due to time constraints, I simply will not be able to mine out every single thing that I could say. To begin, Ezekiel is one of the most structured books in the Bible. The prophet was highly educated, and he knew how to communicate with writing. This structure is like a road map that tells us what to emphasize and how to interpret itself. So to understand the passage before us, we have to understand where it fits in the book.

We also need to understand a little about the man who wrote it, and the providence of God that shaped him to write the way that he did.

Ezekiel was supposed to become a priest. By the time he was deported to Babylon, he would have already begun the apprenticeship, performing many of the duties of a priest but not formally installed until his thirtieth birthday.

His entire life was spent preparing for this priestly ministry. God had other plans. Before he was installed as a priest, **Ezekiel was taken to Babylon in the second deportation in 597 b.c.** He was about twenty-five years old. **God sent Him to be a preacher to the faithful remnant** that God deported to save before the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 b.c.

## The Book's Structure

**1:1-3:27 The Inaugural Vision.** God in his heavenly glory is out for a stroll. Immediately we are drawn to the signs of a theophany. A theophany is when Christ makes an appearance in the Old Testament. We see elements like cloud, brightness, and fire, all of which were present with the nation of Israel when they were in the desert.

We also see living creatures, beasts similar to those gathered around the throne of God in the book of Revelation, and they are following the Spirit's leading. That should grab our attention, as the coming Holy Spirit is a theme that is woven throughout the book. After all of these exciting details, we see the likeness of a human appearance seated on a throne.

By the time we get to this point in the book, it's easy to scratch our heads and wonder what is going on? I think the question we should ask is, **why is the glory of God departed from the temple?**

The following section answers that question in detail.

**4:1-24:27 Judgment on Jerusalem and Judah.** In this section, we see idolatry running rampant. "And the slain shall fall in your midst, and you shall know that I am the Lord. Yet I will leave some of you alive. When you have among the nations some who escape the sword, and when you are scattered through the countries, then those of you who escape will remember me among the nations where they are carried captive, how I have been broken over their whoring heart that has departed from me over their eyes that go whoring after their idols. And they will be loathsome for the evils that they have committed, for all their abominations. *Ezekiel 6:8-9.*

He prophesies about the wrath to come. In chapter 8 he sees the idolatry that is taking place in the temple:

**Images of beasts, faithful people now complicity with idolatry, women worshipping a Mesopotamian cult god, and sun worship.**

Idolatry is nothing new. Israel starts by worshipping the golden calves, and they would not abandon the ba'als, asherah, and offering child sacrifice to Moloch.

Jeremiah 7:9-10 describes them as murderous, adulterous, and lying people. **They had external religion, but their hearts were far from God.** God's glory leaves the temple and the Lord brings his chosen people to utter destruction, just as he promised he would if they broke his covenant.

**25:32-32:32 Judgment Against the Gentile Nations.** Seven nations are named—the completeness of judgment. Though Israel is uniquely God's, all nations are under His dominion.

**33:1-39:29 Promises of Restoration** Here we can quickly detect a tone change. The dust has settled. Judgment has been carried out. **Despite their sin and wickedness, God has not abandoned His people.** He is bringing them back. **He promises them a new covenant.** He will cleanse them from their sin, breathe life into their decaying bones, destroy their enemies, and pour out His Spirit upon them.

**40:1-48:35 Restoration Complete** This section is one of the most difficult to interpret, but I think we can at least pick up on a few of the high points. **The temple is purified, the glory of the Lord has returned, the offerings are pleasing to God, a great prince rules who supplies the offerings for atonement and leads the people into righteousness, the water flowing out of the temple gives life everywhere, and the name of the city is 'The Lord Is There.'**

**Ezekiel moves from judgment to restoration, resurrection, and pure worship.** Our text this morning is the key passage. It is the linch pin on which the restoration of God's people hangs, and it's all about the coming Holy Spirit's Ministry.

## Polluted to Pure

Read verse 25. **Israel profaned God's name—Ezekiel 36:19b-21.** They were chosen to bear the name of God. *"you shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who take his name in vain."* Exodus 20:7.

Not taking the Lord's name in vain is much more than simply guarding your words. It is living all of life as an ambassador of the king. This expectation is for God's children. You have experienced this. When your child does well in a sporting event or a competition, what feeling does it give? It makes you proud. If your child does something shameful, then it brings you shame. Sinful as they were, they were God's children, and they brought shame to His name.

Is there danger of shaming God's name today? Does it ever cross our minds that the worst problem with tolerating sin isn't that it affects our ability to communicate the gospel, but that we might bring reproach to God's name as His children?

*Leviticus 11:45—For I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy."* (ESV). It's easy to complain about the lack of holiness in churches across America today. Those are the people over there. How often do we find ourselves on spiritual cruise control? We join a solid church, establish our groups of likeminded people, and try to

just keep the bad stuff out of the house as much as is reasonable. If I slip up, nobody needs to know. God knows. He sees our sin. It damages His reputation, and it pollutes us.

**God cleanses His people for His name's sake.** Read verses 23-25. We need to pay attention to the shape of the passage. The points mirror each other. This is a common literary device. It emphasizes the point in the middle. **The emphasis of the passage is the coming Holy Spirit.** We should understand that the Holy Spirit is the one working out all of these 'I Will' statements.

Israel is unclean. They are overrun with sin. Sin separates us from God. This is a purification issue. The people were completely unclean and indistinguishable from the surrounding pagans. Under the Old Testament ceremonial system, there were certain procedures to make a person clean after they had done something to become unclean. These rituals usually involve water. **Leviticus 14:51—Cleansing a house.** They would dip a tree branch in water and sprinkle the unclean house with it. In **Numbers 8:7—Levite purification**, they would sprinkle clean or cleansing water on the levite. In **Numbers 19:18—Death of a person in a tent** When someone died in a tent, they would sprinkle cleansing water on the tent and the people inside.

Here we see the presence of **water and spirit together.** This theme develops throughout scripture.

**The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Genesis 1:2**

**For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants. Isaiah 44:3**

It really comes into focus when Jesus tells Nicodemus, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” John 3:5**

Why water? To the Hebrews, cleansing water was symbolic of creation. To be cleansed is to be made new. Jesus takes it from the level of national Israel to the individual person. This is the ministry of the Holy Spirit. You have sinned against a holy God. Therefore, you are separated from Him. You need to be washed. You need forgiveness and a righteousness that is not your own.

**Only God can cleanse your soul.** Notice the “I will” statements. I will sprinkle clean water on you. I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart. There are nine in total. These statements are active. God is at work to bring about restoration for his covenant people, and he's not asking their permission to make sure it's ok and that he isn't violating their free will. Israel simply receives the result of God's working. He is on a mission for His name's sake, by which he swore to Abraham that he would accomplish redemption.

**By applying the finished work of Christ, the cleansing work of the Holy Spirit takes us from unacceptable in God's sight to clean.**

## Obstinate to Obedient

We need a healthy dose of who we really are. **Ephesians 2:1** says that we, speaking to Christians, were dead in the trespasses and sins in which we once walked. Do we really understand what it means to be dead? Dead men don't choose to come to life.

Most are willing to quote Romans 3:23 *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*. What about *Romans 3:10-11 As it is written: none is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God? That's the result of being Spiritually dead*. You often hear of a man drowning in the ocean, and Jesus comes by to offer him rescue. If he will just get in the boat, Christ will take him to shore. That sounds pleasant, but it's not a biblical understanding of who we are. We are like a rotting corpse at the bottom of the sea into whom Christ breathes life.

Of course, we make meaningful choices. God is just in punishing sin because we chose to rebel against Him, but we make that choice because it's within our nature. Our will is restrained by our sinful nature, which is passed down from Adam. God is all powerful. He knows no restraint. Not even the human will.

God has promised to redeem. He will redeem by giving a new heart.

This impurity from which Israel and ourselves needed cleansing is not only external; it's internal.

*Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? (ESV)*

Our text says that they had a heart of stone. What does this mean? Scripture uses the word for heart in three different ways. **3 Meanings of Heart: Mind, Will, and Desire.**

### Heart as Mind

Perhaps you've heard it said that Christianity is about the heart, not the head. It's actually about the heart and the head. Bear with me a moment. *Genesis 6:5 -The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*

It's interesting that the heart has thoughts, isn't it?

*Proverbs 3:5—Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.* This is a Hebrew couplet that demonstrates the relationship between heart and understanding. In other words, we understand things with the heart.

*Hebrews 4:12—For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.* Scripture intends to impact the way that we think. The sinful mind thinks of

self, is suspicious, has divisive thoughts, is greedy, is prideful, and dwells on pleasure. The renewed mind thinks of others, thinks charitably towards others, seeks unity, is thankful, strives for humility, and meditates on the things of God.

There are important applications here. **What you let into your mind is affecting your relationship with God for better or worse.** Pornography and sexually oriented humor are rebellious against God and corrupting. Foul language and intense group think stir the emotions in unhealthy ways. Perhaps one of the most sinister plots to destroy human souls is the LGBTQ+ agenda they're putting in children's shows to normalize rebellion against in God in their eyes.

The mind is the battleground for the heart. When you're struggling through a tough situation, and you're tempted to doubt God's good plan, stop dwelling on the problem and pick up a theology book. Know God deeper and your faith will grow.

## Heart as Will

We've already established that as dead men, our wills are enslaved to the world, the flesh, and the devil. According to scripture, the heart is where the will lives. — *Exodus 9:34–35 But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned yet again and hardened his heart, he and his servants. So, the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people of Israel go, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses. Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine among them...”*

**Pharaoh hardened his will against the command from the Lord.** God said, “let my people go” and pharaoh said no. The sinful will does not want to worship God as he is revealed in scripture. It wants to enjoy the creation, but doesn't want to give glory to the creator. It will not submit to God's commands. A renewed will loves and worships the God of scripture. It gives God the glory for all things. It abides in God's commandments, and it joyfully submits to the Lordship of Christ.

## The Heart as Desire

This one hurts the most. We like to pretend that there is nothing wrong with us and that we have it all together. From the outside looking in, everything seems perfect. But you know what is the desire of your heart.

*Psalm 21:1-2—O Lord, in your strength the king rejoices, and in your salvation how greatly he exults! You have given him his **heart's desire** and have not withheld the request of his lips.*

*Romans 10:1—Brothers, **my heart's desire** and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.*

*Jeremiah 29:13—You will seek me and find me, when you seek me **with all your heart.***

**Do you desire God above all else?** Are you willing to shun the idols of the culture that want to take your soul captive? Are you willing to free yourself from the love of fleeting pleasures and exchange them for the one who makes known the path of life, in whose presence is the fullness of joy, and in whose right hand are pleasures forever more?

A heart filled with sinful desire will succumb to sexual immorality and perversion, drunkenness, the love of money, power, gluttony, and covetousness. A new heart desires to honor God in word, thought, and deed, and to dwell in his presence for eternity.

**A corrupt heart that lacks the Holy Spirit will be set on everything this world has to offer, and a relationship with God will be only an afterthought.**

Even in the church today, many desire to spend eternity in a godless heaven. They don't desire God; they desire not to go to hell.

**The heart is the inner man.** It is the sum of the mind, will, and desire, which can never be separated. **In giving a new heart, the Spirit transforms the entire person from the inside out.** This is a sure sign of the presence of God's Spirit living within you. False prophets can perform signs and wonders, but they are not being conformed to the image of Christ in their thoughts, desires, and deeds. They do not walk in obedience because their heart of stone is contrary to God's commands. Instead, they clean the outside of the cup and the plate like the pharisees, but they do not love God.

**To receive the Spirit's new heart is to receive the gift of faith, which transforms the entire person from the inside out. See Ephesians 2:8-10**

## Sojourner to Citizen

Lastly, **when we are cleansed and given a new heart by the Holy Spirit, he transforms us from sojourners to citizens.** Read verse 28. The land is the complete fulfillment of God's promises. Because of Israel's sin, God justly judged them, and His glory departed from their presence. Some were hauled away in the Babylonian exile as a remnant, but the majority perished in the fall of Jerusalem. God shattered the world of those remaining faithful. The temple would have been everything. That was supposed to be God's place to dwell with His people. You can imagine the heartbreak they felt. They didn't understand that something greater was coming. In their darkest moment, God tells them **all is not lost.**

Let this be abundantly clear. God's faithfulness to fulfill his promises depends wholly and completely on him, not us. Do you want to know what role we play in our salvation? We created the debt which had to be paid with Christ's blood. Because of our sin, the Father sent the Son to live a perfect life and endure our judgment on the cross. He died, was buried, and rose from the grave promising new life now, and new life to come for all who repent of their sins and believe that Jesus is alive.

*In Christ, we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will... In Him, you also, when you heard the*

*word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it. Ephesians 1:11,13.*

As the Holy Spirit comes, he applies the work of Christ arresting our hardened hearts and exchanging our hearts of stone for hearts of flesh, we are made full heirs of the promises which God swore by his name that he will keep. Do you know Christ? Do you know him such that it has changed your entire life? The Spirit's ministry is applying and guaranteeing the promises of God to those who believe in Jesus.

## Application

Why does this matter? The guarantee of God's promised redemption is the presence of the Holy Spirit. False conversion is at stake.

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 2 Corinthians 5:17*

Don't deceive yourself into believing you have the Spirit of God at work in your life when He is not because you prayed the sinner's prayer once, or you've had a spiritual experience. Your need for a new heart will be reflected by what you desire.

What do you desire more than God? Pleasure, wellness, children, success, security? Are you willing to let these desires affect your relationship with God?

**You will reap what you sow, Galatians 6:7-8.** What you think about impacts your desire, and the more you hide sin in your heart, the more difficult submission to the word of God is. Have you resolved to be satisfied in God alone? Only He will eternally satisfy.

What gives you assurance that you know Jesus? How do you know you have received eternal life? Are you being transformed? Does your heart long for communion with God, or are you just trying to be good enough to appease God through works? The only way you can avoid legalism is to experience the transforming heart work of the Holy Spirit. There is all sufficient grace to save you from your sin and give you a new heart.

Final thought: are you resting in Christ? In chapter 18 of Ezekiel, God said, *Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Ezekiel 18:31.* They couldn't do it, but God did. Many are trusting in an altar call, teaching a Sunday school class, a baptism, or taking the catholic mass. None of that can make you right with God. He wants your heart.



## Conclusion

The Spirit's ministry is giving a new heart. He's cleansing, transforming, and securing God's promises. If you're here and know that you do not belong to Christ, listen to the Spirit as he speaks through His word:

*The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price. Revelation 22:17*