

# A NEW HEART

*(Ezekiel 36.22-38)*

Ezekiel: what a character, he could have played Frazer in Dad's Army - "we're all doomed."

Thanks to Jenny last week, I don't have to say too much about this man; we know he was a prophet and we know he had many visions from God. He was born into a priestly family in 622 BC and would have expected to become one in Jerusalem had he not been sent with all the others to Babylon.

The name Ezekiel means "God strengthens" but in the prophecy he is more usually called "son of man"; a title that Jesus used for himself. No other prophet is known by this title.

The other interesting thing is that at the age of 30 when Jewish men start as priests, he was called by God to be a prophet. Far from home, no temple in Babylon to be a priest in, but God had a plan for his life (just like he has for each and every one of us, a plan to prosper you and not harm you, to give you a future that you can't find anywhere else. From 30 – 33 (like Jesus), he preached, performed miracles and generally showed himself to be a forerunner of Christ.

He prophesied many times from the visions that God gave him and its assumed by scholars (not me – I mean I'm not a scholar but I trust their reasonings) that there were 3 periods in his life when he heard from God or saw visions) from God. In between there must have been periods of quiet or silence. Maybe Ezekiel was silent and didn't say much because he had nothing to say. Or maybe God did speak to him all the time but only gave him words to share with others at certain times, (my theory or explanation for myself).

Ezekiel is a book of predictions, just like Daniel and Revelation. Most of these predictions have come true already. In fact, there over 700 separate events in the Bible and nearly 600 have come true ALREADY.

100% accuracy from God, by the way please don't ask me for this list as I don't have it, just think about Jesus and all the things said about him 100's of years before he came to earth as a baby.

Then there is this passage we have just read V.24 "For I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land". Israel celebrates its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year!

OK, that's my bit on Ezekiel. What about this group of people on the screen?

This amazing group includes my Daughter in Law, Vicky. They have all managed to stay alive physically with the help of Donors. 2 of them have new hearts, 5 of them have new lungs (10 lungs in all) and 1 of them has a new kidney. Last week, they went to the top of Sale Fell in the Lake District to celebrate Vicky's 19<sup>th</sup> year since her double lung donation. Her husband, son and friends were there too.

That's a wonderful story of people receiving new parts; It is happening every day thanks to God's hand in our creation.

Ezekiel's passage about a new heart is not a physical one, it's a spiritual one. Your donation has arrived and his name is Jesus.

In v.26 in the amplified version we read "A new heart will I give you and a new spirit will I put within you and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh".

God is speaking to us through Ezekiel and he doesn't mess about. HE TELLS US WHO HE IS. I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD, I WILL DO THIS and I WILL DO THAT.

God is mighty, authoritative, he is not just the God who is good. He is good – ALL THE TIME. But you might not think so if you are living with a stony heart. Too many people seem to think God has no boundaries, we can do what we like they say.

Yes, he is limitless, no boundaries to where he can go or what he can do apart from: HE CANNOT LIE! But he has standards; so high – we all fail to reach those standards in our physical state.

We can only put our hands up in surrender and like the criminal that is caught say “It was me who dunnit, I am guilty your honour.”

God does not want any of us to fail, he sent his only son Jesus to do ALL that is required, you and I should know that.

We can only get a new heart when we give up the old one, when we submit to God, accept our free gift of life and live in the knowledge that it is by his hand he has done this and nothing to do with anything we have done for him, as if we could do anything for our God who sits on his throne high and exalted above every other god you can think of or even consider.

Coming to church doesn't make you a Christian; saying prayers, singing hymns or reading the Bible doesn't make you a Christian. God's love will find you in those places but it's up to you if you want a new heart or not. Sitting in your garage doesn't make you a car, going to McDonalds every day won't turn you into a burger.

It is God's purpose, his great name alone, for his name's sake that you and I are gifted/donated an eternal life. Life without an end, life in all its fullness. Just so long as we realise we are not good enough by ourselves to become part of God's kingdom.

It's all through the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who suffered, was crucified, buried for 3 days then rose again victoriously to display the awesome wonder of the almighty God, the Creator of this universe.

Nothing we can do can persuade God to love us anymore than he does right now. Not good deeds, not donating your organs, not giving all your money away.

But nothing can separate you and me from the love of God either. As far as the east is from the west, we can't hide from God, not anywhere on this planet or on any other planet (just in case you think of trying that one). Believe me I have tried to hide – many times, you may have as well or may even be hiding today! You can't hide from God - period. So why do we try?

Well that's Ezekiel but what does John tells us to do?

"If you really love me, you will keep my commands (that's Jesus) I will ask the Father and he will give the Spirit of truth – the world cannot welcome him to their heart because they don't see or recognise him, but you do because he lives in you." Is that you today?

The true miracle of my Daughter in law's life happened on a Wednesday night in Middlesbrough, before she received her new lungs she received her new heart *spiritually*. She went with Ann to a midweek meeting where the speaker was Andrew Miles. A blind man, he went to Bible college with his guide dog and all the usual benefits for a blind man and God healed him, so he lost his benefits but kept his dog because she was too old to go to anyone else - isn't God good?

Anyhow, it was a teaching seminar and he was most surprised when God changed his agenda and he gave his testimony. Vicky gave her life to Jesus that night, she was 23 years old with a baby that was only a few months old. She is now 47! and my grandson is 24 - now that's God for you.

Our God is a wonderful, faithful, never-doubting-you God and he is here today. He never fails to accomplish what he says he will do – hence the outstanding statistics of the Bible, you could never get a bookmaker to give you the odds for 600 out 700 predictions coming true and the rest is still to come.

If God says he will do it, he will; he never fails. All the prophets in our Bible spoke only when God spoke to them. There were many years in Ezekiel's life when nothing was said or nothing seemed to happen. So

trust God with all your heart, with all your strength and with all your might and he will direct your paths, he will bless you and he will answer your prayers—when he decides it's best for you.

A lovely lady from our previous church prayed for her husband to accept his new spiritual heart from Jesus. He died between Christmas and New Year. I learnt this week that 2 weeks before he died, he gave his life to Jesus. His wife had prayed for years, ever since she had become a Christian but he didn't want to know; God did, he wanted to know this man whose wife never stopped praying for her husband. That's what matters to God and God hears our prayers.

I have to tell you that I didn't intend to say all this when I first started to study these Scriptures. But all this week I have thought God wants me to share all this and it was confirmed by the news from my old church as well as spending some time with Vicky. I believe this message is for someone or some others here today.

I want to finish with a song; you can sing along if you know it or just listen to it. Please stay seated and let God speak to you through it. After the service, there will be people in the chapel to pray with you or you can ask for prayer right where you are now. God always meets us where we are, there's no need to dress up, rehearse it or wait another day. You only have to give him your old heart and He will give you an even better one back. A NEW HEART.

"Create in me a clean heart..."

Let us pray...