

Create in Me a New Heart

by Joe Focht

God desires to give us a new heart, a heart that is responsive to Him and His presence, and this can be achieved through faith, repentance, and the help of the Holy Spirit.

Duration: 32:19

Scripture: John 4:21

Topics: "Moral Decline", "Heart Renewal"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker highlights the contradiction in society's approach to entertainment and morality. He points out that while there are restrictions on discussing God, sin, and righteousness, the flesh is being indulged with violent video games and other questionable content. The speaker also emphasizes the importance of the heart in our relationship with God, stating that a consecrated heart is more powerful than intellect. He mentions a study connecting violent video games with physical aggression and urges parents to be aware of the impact on teenagers whose impulse control center is still developing. The speaker also raises concerns about the moral decline in society, questioning the normalization of inappropriate behavior and the disregard for God's principles.

Transcript

Ezekiel chapter 11, verses 9, well, I'll read 16 to 20, quickly. Therefore say, thus saith the Lord God, although I have cast them far off among the nations, speaking of the fact that he's going to, when Nebuchadnezzar comes, he's going to drive the children of Israel out amongst the nations. And although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries, and I like King James here, sorry if your translation robs it a little, but, I will be to them a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come, is one way to translate the Hebrew, and I like that because it seems like the Lord is waiting for them in the places that they will come to.

Almost like when Elijah gets to the cave, the Lord says, what are you doing here? He was waiting in the cave for him, and here it says God is going to scatter his people amongst the nations. They're not going to have the temple, they're not going to have Jerusalem, but they're not going to be missing anything because God says when they come in these countries, they're going to come to me, and I will be a sanctuary to them in all the places I've scattered them. I will be that sanctuary.

It's almost as Jesus tells the woman at the well, the time is coming when it'll neither be in Jerusalem or Mount Gerizim where those who worship the Father will worship in spirit and truth, because God is a spirit,

and those who worship must worship in a spirit and truth. So here I will be a sanctuary to them wherever they come. Therefore say, thus saith the Lord God, I will gather you from the people, assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel, and they shall come, they shall take away all the detestable things thereof and all the abominations thereof.

Notice verse 19 and 20 is where we are this morning. And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you, and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh that they may walk in my statutes and keep my ordinances and do them. They shall be my people, and I will be their God.

Israel had been a people that were separated from all of the other nations of the world. God had done miracles and signs and wonders, had delivered them from Egypt, separated them, brought them through the Red Sea, fed them for 40 years in the wilderness, the pillar of cloud, the pillar of fire, the manna falling from heaven. They crossed the Jordan River to come into Canaan.

The walls of Jericho had fallen down. God had done miracle after miracle. He had given them the land.

He instructed them. He fed them. He led them.

He cared for them. And as they came into the land, sadly, of course, the pattern of the nation was much like the pattern in our lives sometimes. They came into the land.

They settled in the land. They were blessed in the land. They prospered in the land.

And as they prospered in the land, no longer so desperate then for God because of all of the other distractions around them, they began to cool. And as they cooled, then they began to worship other gods, and they rebelled. And then God would judge them and chasten them.

And then they would fall on their knees, and they would cry out in repentance. And God would be merciful, and he would restore them, and he would bless them again. And then when he blessed them, they would begin to prosper.

When they began to prosper, they would cool again. When they cooled, they would become rebellious and idolatrous, and God would chasten them. And when he chastened them, they would cry out.

They would repent, so he would bless them. And when he blessed them, come on, you should be able to do it by now. And, you know, they just, you know, go through that, you know, that process.

You and I know when things are desperate, we pray desperate prayers. When things are not desperate, we kind of cruise, you know, like we need God's help less when we're cruising than when we're screaming or something. And the truth is we are desperately in need of him all of the time.

And, of course, that process had gone on for centuries. And now, as I know, it's been long going through Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, all of that surrounding Jerusalem and Judah and their idolatry. And it's been years now.

It's been chapter after chapter after chapter. And it kind of seems redundant. But you think, Lord, why did you give so much print to this whole process? Why are we still going through, you know, 60 chapters in Isaiah, you know, 50 chapters in Jeremiah, Lamentations? Now we're headed into more chapters.

And, Lord, why? And I think it's because he wants every generation to be warned. He wants it to be written out, all of its detail. He wants us to understand how the world is alluring and would pull our hearts away, and that ultimately he can't condone that.

And after centuries of unheeded warning and centuries of unheeded warning and prophets and so forth, and now, finally, in these chapters, it comes to the point where it's an IChabod. The glory is departing. They're unaware of it.

When we see tonight, they're worshiping. They have no idea that the presence of God is there. The glory of God is there.

And yet, slowly but surely, he's withdrawing himself, not because he wants to. His heart is broken, but because they have desecrated the temple. They've desecrated everything that's holy.

They have little understanding of the high privilege that God has given to them. And as a nation, they have turned away. Many unheeded warnings.

I think of our own nation, and certainly there have been unheeded warnings or warnings that had heated for a little while and then turned away. Our nation, we don't, you know, can we say one nation under God? Or do we have to have the Supreme Court decide whether we can say under God anymore? Not allowed to have prayer in public places. And, you know, and yet you look at the things that are being handed to the generation that's behind us.

We can't talk about God. We can't do that. But look at the stuff that's available.

We're trying to decide, can Michael Jackson, you know, sleep with young boys? Is that normal? Is it normal to let Terry Shivo die? Is it normal to let... We look at what's going on around us. We look into the lyrics and the music industry. We look about what's being handed to us through video and DVDs and the movie.

And yet we don't, can't say anything about God. You can't say anything about sin. You can't say anything about righteousness.

You can't use the H word, that's for sure. You don't want to talk about hell in this generation. You know, you can't do any of these things.

And you look at everything that's out there. And yet it's as a sense there's no more warning. There's no more parameters.

The flesh is being handed everything, but we're being told publicly we're not allowed to put out any heed, any warning. You know, we're not allowed to say, this ends in problems. And I just read this article this week by Dr. David Walsh, who has done a study connecting violent video games with physical aggression.

He's been on CBS on 60 Minutes and so forth. He said this, teenagers, if you are a teenager, you might want to listen, but according to this, it may not sink in. But if you're a parent with a teenager, you want to listen.

He said this, the teenage brain is different from the adult brain. I don't know if that's teenagers or parents laughing right now. The teenage brain is different from the adult brain.

The impulse control center, the part of the brain that enables us to think ahead and consider consequences and manage different urges, that's the part of the brain right behind the forehead, it's called the prefrontal cortex, that's under construction during the teenage years. In fact, the wiring is not completed until the early 20s. Now, this is a psychologist, a scientist, he's saying that part that where you consider consequences, you consider about controlling urges, that that part really doesn't firm up until early 20s, but look at what the world is handing to 13 and 14 year olds.

And look, teenagers, if you're arguing with your parents and they're saying to you, didn't I tell you this? You never think about the consequences. He said, look, my prefrontal cortex is still under development. Don't you listen in church? You know, obviously your hearing's going bad because of your age, and my prefrontal cortex is not fully developed in my age, and you know, just, but look what's being handed to them.

But God doesn't talk about the prefrontal cortex here. He says, I'm going to give you a new spirit. I'm going to take away the stony places in your heart and give you a new heart.

He's not doing brain surgery, he's doing heart surgery. Because God knows the heart of a 14 year old or a 12 year old or a 16 year old can be consecrated and given over to the things of God, and that the heart ultimate is a more powerful, more fiery driving force in our lives than our intellect is. When something's real, and we just know it.

When we step to that place beyond intellect, and we know this is real, I know it's real. I sense his presence. When I read the word, he speaks to me.

I look at what he's given me. I know he's there. I know he's watching.

I know he's real. That there's something that can take place in the heart. And God says the problem with his people through the ages is the heart.

They needed an undivided heart, a loyal heart. They needed a new spirit. They had stony, unresponsive hearts.

And as Christians, we can do the same thing. We get settled into the land that God gives us. We get settled into the temple or the place of worship that he gives us.

We get settled into Christianese and a Christian culture, and we can get desensitized. We can get hard-hearted. We get stony places in our heart where there used to be fire, where things used to be soft towards the things of God.

And like David, we can find ourselves saying, Lord, create in me a clean heart. Renew a right spirit within me, Lord. And God says the day is coming when this is what I'm going to do and make their hearts--not their minds, their hearts--responsive to the things of God.

He's not the only one who says it. Jeremiah as he sees the difficulty of God's people and their sin, he says, but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel. After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Ezekiel in chapter 36 is going to say, then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean and all your filthiness and all your idols. I will, of all of those things, cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you.

A new spirit will I put within you. I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes.

You shall keep my judgments and do them, and you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people. I will be your God, and I will also save you from all of your uncleanness. Paul says much the same thing in 2 Corinthians chapter 3, verse 3, where he says, for as much as you are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ, the letter of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God, not in tables of stone, but in the fleshly tables of the heart.

Paul says, our life and our message is written upon your hearts, not on stone, but on fleshly tables of the heart, affirming the very same thing in the New Testament. God doesn't want a legal relationship with us. You have to do this, and you have to do that, and you have to do this, because ultimately he wants a love relationship.

And who wants a love relationship like that, with a husband, with a wife, with children, with the parents? Who wants it to be legal? We want love out of loyalty, out of tenderness, out of genuineness, not at the point of a gun. I like Kirk Douglas, and I was watching the--Ulysses is one of my favorite movies, where he wipes out all those guys at the end--but earlier, in the movie, in the part of the Odyssey, originally, you know, he's this long journey of years coming home, and he's--they're going to go past this island, all the mariners, the seagoers know of, it's famous, where these seductress, these sirens, these, you know, women live on this island, and they are enchantresses, and they sing this song, and it's so beautiful that it lures in these ships to the rocks. The sailors and the captains hear their voices, hear the song.

It is so alluring, so desirable. They so long to get close and to have more, that the ships are destroyed on the rocks, and then they become castaways. They die there, imprisoned there.

And Ulysses knows that he's coming there, so he says to his crew, I want you guys to clog your ears with wax so you can't hear anything. Of course, maybe your kid, maybe it's not the prefrontal cortex, check their ears for wax, but he says, I want you to jam wax in all of your ears so you can't hear anything, and I want you to chain me to the mast, because I want to hear this, and no matter what I say, what I do, don't stop you, Ropess. So, of course, here's the whole crew, the rowing, and Kirk Douglas Ulysses, he's chained to the mast there.

He's, ah, it's so beautiful. Stop. He's screaming.

He's losing his mind, but he's chained to the mast, and he wants to get in there. He wants more of it. He wants to get closer to it.

Of course, they just keep rowing, and they get past it. But God doesn't want to chain us to the mast. He doesn't want to say, here's the world that's so alluring, it's so desirable.

There's something in you that resonates with sin and the desires of the flesh, but what I'm going to do is I'm going to put wax in all your friends' ears, and I'm going to chain you to the mast, and we're going to row past it all, and you're going to be screaming, let me loose, cut me loose, let me have it, but that's how the Bible works, and no, no, that's not what he wants. That's not what he wants from us. He's not going to

force us, but he says he will give us a new heart.

He will give us a new compass, a new drive mechanism. How? How does that happen? How do I rekindle an old flame that used to be there? I was on fire for Christ at one point in time, and I'm cooled, and I'm turned away, and I'm living in sin. How do I get back there? Like it's a geographical problem.

It's a spiritual problem, not a spatial problem. Or maybe you're here this morning, and you don't know Christ, and somebody drug you here, chained you to the mast, and you're saying, how do I just get a new heart? Right, right, okay, okay, yeah, how do I just--and the Bible says that we ask. We ask.

How can these things be? How can that happen? You know, we have that question in the New Testament, John chapter 3, where a man named Nicodemus comes to Christ at night, and Christ says to him, Nicodemus, you're never going to see the kingdom of God unless you're born again. And he says to Christ, how can these things be? Israel, the most privileged nation they had come back from captivity, and yet even though they had come back from captivity, and the temple was being built, and the Pharisees were the guardians of orthodoxy, they were still dead. And at the center of this privileged nation, Josephus tells us at this time, there were 40,000 rabbis in Israel.

And even more at the center than the 40,000 rabbis, there were 22,000 Levites. They were more at the center. And amongst the 22,000 Levites, there were several thousand priests of Aaron's line.

And then at the center of that was the Sanhedrin, 70 men who were at the center of the most privileged nation in the world in the midst of the 40,000 rabbis, in the midst of the 22,000 Levites, and in the midst of the priests was the 70, the most privileged spiritually, as it were, religiously. And at the center of that is a man named Nicodemus, the third wealthiest man in Jerusalem, we're told at this point in time. Jesus is going to say to him, are you a master in Israel? You don't understand these things.

Literally what it says is, are you the teacher in Israel? He was a Pharisee. He was in the school of Gamaliel. And Josephus tells us it was in vogue, if you're going to study Jewish theology, Hebrew theology, to study with Nicodemus.

Nicodemus was the man. He was at the center. From where he was, every way was down.

He was at the top of the pile, disillusioned, empty, loaded with questions. And he comes to Jesus at night. And he says, teacher, we know you're sent from God.

There's reality, and it's resonating. Nobody could do the things you do, except God sent him. And Jesus said, Nicodemus, unless a man is born again, he's never going to see the kingdom.

Isn't that interesting? Jesus doesn't record that story as he's talking to a publican, or to a prostitute, or to a drunkard. And he spent plenty of time with them. He takes the most privileged religious character on the planet to hold before us.

The most theologically correct, but dead. He was so right, he was dead right. The guy, and he says, and he holds him up and says, if this one needs to get born again, so does everybody else.

And Nicodemus, you can't see the king unless you're then mind to mind. Nicodemus is a great thinker. He's engaged.

What does that mean? Do I have to go back into my mother's womb a second time? I'm the product of everything that my life has made me. I'm supposed to be born again? And what are you talking about? Jesus says, no, look, you have to be born of the water and of the spirit. What's born of the flesh is flesh.

Water. What's born of the spirit is spirit. Marvel not.

Now he's taking him beyond the intellect. Marvel not that I say unto you, you must be born again. He says, Nicodemus, there are things beyond the grasp of human intellect that are necessary for life.

Don't let your intellectual capacity rob you of something that spiritual that needs to take place in your heart. Nicodemus for everybody in this room, there are things beyond our intellectual capacity that God desires to give to us. And if all we do is reach out for the things we understand, we're going to be pauperish.

We're not to be unlearned. Our faith is an educated faith. There's so much today we can study about creation and evolution and culture.

And we have so much at our disposal today. But when we begin to reach vertically, we have to do that by faith. How can this happen? He asked the same question.

How can this be? How can I get a new heart? How can I be born again? How can I get a new spirit? And Jesus says to him, and I know Nicodemus was intent. He was listening because he was facing reality and he was so disillusioned by religion. And Jesus said, Nicodemus, are you the teacher in Israel? You don't understand.

If I told you earthly things and you don't understand them, how am I going to tell you heavenly things? But remember this. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, that would be something he'd be completely familiar with. So must the Son of Man be lifted up.

This is what he says to Nicodemus. Nicodemus, this is your history. You're familiar with it.

Do you believe it's true? You teach it's true. The children of Israel were in rebellion. They were in sin.

They were in the wilderness. And God sent among them vipers, fiery serpents. And it says the people were being bitten by these serpents and they were dying.

The neurotoxins were getting into their bloodstream and shutting down their breathing, shutting down their body. They're dying. And God didn't say to Moses, grab this bag of anti-venom, get your hypodermic needle and get busy.

He said, Moses, put up a serpent on the pole in the middle of the camp and tell them that if they look upon the serpent, they shall live. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up. Nicodemus, there are things beyond the grasp of the intellect.

You teach the people that though they had neurotoxins in their blood, though they were poisoned, that if by faith they listened to God and they looked up and saw the serpent on the pole that they would live. That's beyond human reason. That's beyond intellect.

And what I'm saying in the same way, the Son of Man must be lifted up. You know, Ezekiel and Jeremiah don't tell us anything of the cost. What is the cost of a new heart, of a new birth, of a new spirit? He hints at it here.

He says, Nicodemus, so the Son of Man must be lifted up. How does it happen? How can this be? The same way as Moses and the serpent. If they look to me, look to me.

Though the neurotoxin of sin is killing them in their system, if they look in faith, they shall live. They shall live. The heart will change.

The things they once ignored or despised when they just wanted to live in sin and the natural part of their being resonated with the temptations of this world and they felt like they needed to be chained to the mast, those things that they despised of Christianity or people talking about spiritual things, they're going to start to embrace the spiritual things and to despise the things that brought them into bondage. The heart will change. They're going to resonate with truth.

Something inside will transpire and change, Nicodemus. And it happens by faith, not by reason, not by intellect. You're here this morning and you don't know Christ.

This is where we get the passage about being born again. It's what Ezekiel and Jeremiah, many of the Old Testament spoke of, a new heart, a new spirit, being born again. In fact, the word that he uses is another, born from above.

The second birth has to do with the vertical, not the natural. How does it happen? By knowing that you're poisoned, by looking to Christ. Isaiah, he said, look unto me all ye ends of the earth and be ye saved.

To look to Jesus. Forget about church. Forget about religion.

Forget about everything that Nicodemus has filled his life with that brought him nowhere. Don't judge Jesus because of what you've seen in the church or what you've seen on television with televangelists. Don't judge Jesus Christ by what out there claims to be Christian.

Judge Jesus Christ by his own claims. Go to the scripture and see what he said in regards to your life and put him on the spot. Embrace the claims of Christ and see what it means in your life.

And today you can look to him and you can be saved. It doesn't matter what you've done. As a Christian, if you're here and your heart is cooled and you're compromised and your heart has become stony and hardened again, it's not how do I get back.

It's not spatial. It's spiritual. You don't need a map.

You don't need to get on a map quest to get back to Jesus. You need to get on your knees and say, Lord, my heart is hardened and I'm looking to you again and in faith, Lord, because God won't ignore the cost that he paid to make that available. Whenever I come to these passages on a new heart, I remember the story that Sandy McIntosh told us way back in the old building, 1987-88, of a family in California, a young eight-year-old boy, congenital heart problems, was dying on a transplant list, waiting for a new heart.

And the parents were going through the torture of wondering whether he's going to make it until that heart came available. There had to be a match and so forth. And in the same hospital, a boy was brought in an emergency, auto accident, on life support.

The doctors had gone through the process of letting that take place for several days on life support, knowing that he was never going to be revived, never going to come back, and finally said to the parents, look, this is what's happening. And we don't ever want to seem insensitive and please forgive us, but if

you're willing to donate your son's heart, there is a boy down the hall who will live. That's all we're going to say.

We'll leave it with you. You talk about it. You can let us know.

And the family came back and said, you can take our son's heart under one condition. What's that? That we want to see the other little boy before he leaves the hospital. The doctors had to go to the parents of the child who needed the transplant, because usually you don't find out that fast where the heart came from.

And the parents, of course, said, well, certainly, we make that concession. The papers were signed. The heart transplant took place.

And before that little boy left the hospital, the other parents came to see this little boy who lived. And, of course, the parents wept, they embraced, and finally said, why the request? Why was it that you wanted to come in and to see our son? And the father said, because we wanted to, if it's okay with you, bend down and put our ear on his chest and hear our son's heart beating one more time. And that's what the father wants.

It was at that cost to him that he gave his son. All he wants is to bow down and hear the heart of Christ beating within us. And there's glory all over that, that God could take such as us and give us a new heart and a new spirit and an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, that fades not away.

And we want to dabble and fiddle around with things in the world, and we don't understand that the glory of God is abiding over us, the glory of eternity, the glory of God. God marked our lives, so he's not ashamed to call us his sons and his daughters, to stoop down, as it were, and hear the very heart of his own son born anew within us, the cost unimaginable. If you don't know that God before you leave today, we just pray that you would have the courage just to come up after the service and say, if God really loves me that way, I need heart surgery.

I need a transplant. My life is so out of whack and so empty and so off course, I need a change. We would love to pray with you and give you a Bible, give you some literature to read.

I encourage you to make your way up here after the service is over. For those of you that are believers, as the musicians come and we sing this last song, you know, Jesus challenges the church and says, you know, you got all kinds of great stuff going on, all kinds of ministries, you're touching the world, but I have this against you. You've lost your first love.

It's all become business. There's no relationship. It's all business.

There's no love. And a church that's in love with Christ is going to change the world. I encourage you as believers to say, Lord, break up the fallow ground in my life, the stony ground, soften my heart again, create in me a clean heart, renew a right spirit within me.

And if you're here today, you're thinking, I don't need none of that. I'm an on fire Christian and my heart is just the way it should be. Then pray for me because I want all of it I can get.

You can stand and say, Lord, I don't need none of this. None of this applies to me. That's great.

Would you pray for me? Let's stand. Let's pray together. Lord, we look to you and we thank you for your word.

This simplicity of it, Lord, in these passages, familiar to us for years and years and years, and yet familiarity with our mind, Lord, falls short of the fire in our hearts that should burn as we look deeper into these things, Lord, as the years go by, as they become more profound to us, as we become more familiar with our own failings and with your grace, your glory. Lord, we pray for those here today who may not know you, that you draw them to yourself. Give them a new heart, a new beginning, a new spirit.

And Lord, for us, your sons and daughters, soften us, Lord. Drag the plow of life and of your word, of your Holy Spirit over our hearts. Break up the clots, Father, the hard places, the stony ground.

And let the love of Christ be shed abroad from our hearts. We believe we're praying according to your will. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

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