

With it beating an average of 100,000 times a day it's surprising that the heart doesn't give out more often than it does. After all, have you ever heard of a car engine that ran 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for 70 years without the need of a tune-up? Still, there are times when the human heart goes bad from lack of exercise, failure to eat right, or bad genetics. In some cases the heart may be so damaged that a new one is needed. How is your heart feeling this morning? Is it beating with strong regular intervals, delivering an adequate supply of oxygen throughout your body? Even if you haven't had so much as a heart flutter, God tells us this morning that we all need a new heart. Of course he's not talking about this thing beating inside of us, he's talking about an attitude. God wants us each to have a heart, an attitude, that recognizes its own sinfulness and treasures God's forgiveness. If we don't have such a heart we are to get one because it's a matter of eternal life or death. So today, we travel not to The Villages Hospital, but to Open Bible Hospital. You are being rolled on a gurney into surgery. If you want to really continue living, it is time for a heart transplant. Lord, "Give Me a New Heart!"

Our story for today takes place in Jerusalem around 594 B.C. Ezekiel, the prophet is telling God's people that they will be punished by the nation of Babylon for their sins against the true God. He tells them that the temple of Jerusalem would be completely destroyed and they would be deported. The people, however, weren't willing to admit that their sin had brought this judgment. Instead of repenting they quoted the following proverb: "The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezekiel 18:2). What the exiles were saying is that since it was their fathers who had eaten the sour grapes, why should they, the children be left with the bad aftertaste? In other words why should they be punished for sins their fathers were guilty of?

Now it was true that their fathers had been guilty of thoroughly turning away from the Lord. Forty years earlier, King Manasseh had led the people to commit more sins than the Canaanites before them. He not only sacrificed his own children to idols but also filled the Lord's temple with foreign gods and killed God's prophets. Tradition says that Manasseh even had the prophet Isaiah sawed in two! In contrast to their fathers, hadn't they, the people of Ezekiel's day, returned to the Lord under King Josiah? Hadn't they started celebrating the Passover again and faithfully offered their sacrifices? How could Ezekiel claim that it was their sin and not their fathers' that had brought about this calamity?

Yes, King Josiah had brought about a reformation destroying the idols his grandfather Manasseh had made, but unfortunately this was a superficial reform for not everyone appreciated what Josiah did. While the people of Ezekiel's day may not have been sacrificing their children to the idol Molech, they were guilty of bringing their sacrifices to God out of a sense of duty, not love and thankfulness, and their weekday lives didn't match their weekend worship. They cheated on their spouses, they harbored grudges against their neighbors, and they lied to get things done. No, the people of Ezekiel's day were not without guilt and the worst part of it was they didn't recognize it and blamed others for the hardship that they had brought upon themselves.

Pastor, my son is bi-polar. That is why he has such problems with alcohol abuse. Now wait a minute. Your son gets drunk. He has the choice to drink or not drink. He drinks to excess. Drunkenness is a sin! Pastor, I am suffering from discontentment in my life. I have these physical disabilities where I can't do what I used to be able to do. I have a right to grumble. Now wait a minute. Discontentment is sin. As Christians we

accept our circumstances from God, trusting that He knows what is best for us, and we ask Him to use your difficult circumstances to glorify Him. Pastor, I get frustrated again and again, when my plans are blocked. Now wait a minute. Frustration is sin. What happened is part of God's plan for your life today. God wanted you to respond in faith and in a God-honoring way and you didn't.

The word sin has disappeared from our vocabulary. The word disease or dysfunctional has replaced the word. Strong biblical words have been excised from our vocabulary. No longer is it adultery, but rather an affair or an act of impropriety. No longer do politicians lie, but they misspeak or they didn't mean it that way. Corporate executives do not steal, but they commit fraud. By nature we like to minimize our own guilt and blame others for our sins. Children are good at this. "But he hit me!" "So, she started it!" The sad thing is that, as they get older, children only get better at using their old heart until, as adults, they say things like, "I wouldn't have lost my patience if she wouldn't have been so rude!" Or "I wouldn't dislike him so much if he wasn't so arrogant!"

Brothers and sisters, we are all born with this old heart that doesn't want to take responsibility for sin, and that's dangerous. No, it's more than dangerous; it's downright damnable for God said in our text: "The soul who sins is the one who will die" (Ezekiel 18:4). God doesn't care if it was your brother's teasing that made you so mad that you hit him. He doesn't care if it's your co-worker's lack of social grace that makes you fume every time you have to work with him. He doesn't care if it was the clerk's rudeness that caused you to lose your patience. He simply says that if you react in a sinful way then you deserve to die.

Any sin is cosmic treason. Any Sin is vile, virulent, and villainous. It is rebelling against God. It is grieving God. It is despising His Law and person.. Think of it like this. If you were on the 10th floor of a burning building with no way to safety except jumping out the window onto an airbag the fire fighters had waiting for you, you would want to make sure that you jumped so you hit the airbag. If you over jump by a centimeter or ten meters the result is still the same – death. That's the way it is with sin. It doesn't matter whether you miss God's goal of perfection by a centimeter, ten meters, or a kilometer the result is still the same – you've sinned and deserve God's eternal punishment for sin.

So we need a new heart, a heart that recognizes one's own sinfulness. Don't ever excuse your sin no matter what the circumstances. You may be tired of the way someone treats you but that does not give you the excuse to blow up or speak badly about that person. You may feel justified in getting hot with that customer service rep who didn't do what she promised but God doesn't see it that way. Remember what Paul said in our Epistle lesson this morning. "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:3-5).

God wants us to have a new heart because he wants us to live (Ezekiel 18:32). He is so concerned about our eternal well-being that he not only tells us to get a new heart, he gives us that heart. Speaking earlier through Ezekiel God said, "I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God" (Ezekiel 11:19).

Exactly how does God give us this new heart? Surprisingly it's a lot like the way you would receive a new heart if you checked into the University Hospital for a heart transplant. Before you can receive a new heart someone has to die. Not only that, the person who has died, whose heart is now available to be transplanted, has to have been willing to donate his or her heart before you can receive it, and that heart has to be a match or your body will reject it. You see the similarities with Jesus don't you? It's Jesus who has given us this new heart that God demands. He made that possible by dying on the cross for the sins of our old heart. Like an organ donor Jesus was willing to do this, actually he was even more willing than an organ donor to give us his heart so we could live. An organ donor will only give you his heart once he's done with it, not a moment before. That's not what Jesus did. He willingly died so that we could receive this new heart. But how do we know that this new heart Jesus gave us is a match? How do we know that this new heart is going to work for us? We know it will work because Jesus promised that he came to die for the sins of the whole world and that whoever believes in him has eternal life (John 3:16). There is not one person here to whom Jesus has not given this heart and treasure of forgiveness.

So now what? How should you treat this heart that God has given you through faith in Christ? Well how does a heart transplant recipient care for his new heart? First of all he won't treat that new heart like he treated the old one. He won't keep on eating French fries everyday for lunch or slather the gravy on the mashed potatoes lest his new heart gets all crusty and hard like his old one. In the same way we will want to treasure this new heart and forgiveness God has given us by staying away from sin. God urged the people of Ezekiel's time, "Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed" (Ezekiel 18:31). While we will still fall into sin we dare not willingly live in it. We dare not say that we can't help being grumpy or sarcastic so we're not going to bother trying to change our ways. That's the attitude of the old heart, not the new heart.

Whether you realize it or not you are a heart transplant recipient. Christ died for your sin and gave you his clean heart. Treasure that heart brothers and sisters by owning up to your sins, trusting that God has forgiven them, and then by turning away from them. Take care of this heart for without it you remain under God's judgment. Take care of this heart because it's given you much more than a new lease on life; it guarantees eternal life.