A New Heart – Pastor’s Hospital Miracle

Ezekiel 36:26

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O’Neill

Would you take a Bible and look at Ezekiel 36:26, “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” I want everybody to know I’m actually kind of playing games with that verse but reminding you that that is God’s promise. He will give us a new heart. That is, he would change the attitudes and the feelings we have towards each other and the motives that govern our lives. He would change how we feel inside about things. He would take out of us the selfishness that governs us apart from Jesus and he would put in us the pure heart of Jesus. In other words, he would give us the whole truth of the clean heart that God has promised us.

And then what I’d like to try to do in a realistic way this morning is to relate it to a blessing that God has brought to us. If I cry at all it’s not because of any sorrow but it’s just because of the wonderful thing that God has done in me and I think in us as a family.

This is about the 19th of March. Just about a week ago God just gave me a new heart and I’ll tell you about it. I’d like to point out to you why I think it happened. And I hope that it’ll bring home to you God’s ability to give us not only new physical hearts but new spiritual hearts. He is able and had already done the same work in Jesus for us. He is able in the same way to make that real in us as he did in fact make real the physical heart that he gave us in Jesus, and specifically in me, these past few days.

So I’ll try to tell the story quickly without a whole lot of detail and fuss. If I falter at all my wife will have to step right in and tell. I know those of you who love me must have thought when you heard what happened to me, “Is that poor guy still alive at all?” And you can see I’m very much alive and Jesus has done a great work.

I think you all knew I had trouble sleeping over the past year or so. I attributed it to jetlag. After 30 years of back and forwards to England and then to Thailand I thought that the body was getting out of synch with itself and never knew when to sleep. So often I would waken up in the mornings with a kind of restlessness. I would say it was a restlessness rather than strain or pain -- just a restlessness. But admittedly in past months I would have felt just a little strain. At times Irene would waken up and I’d be kneeling at my bedside about four o’clock in the morning and she’d say, “Are you praying?” And I’d say, “Yes, I’m okay.” And I would get into bed and say, “Yes, God has given me release.” Then I’d often sleep the rest of the night.

So that was going on and I was very tired. I came back from England this last time still tired and disappointed at feeling so tired after what was really a vacation. So Irene of course in her great kindness said, “Why don’t you go down to Florida for a week or a couple of weeks.” And that’s what I did. I had a nice quiet time there and came back here probably two weeks ago. I was preparing to go and visit you all in London and felt, “Yes, I’m ready for it and that’s good.”

I admit I still was not sleeping wonderfully but I thought, “Yes I can handle it.” So I was looking forward to going to England. But last Thursday morning I woke at four o’clock and felt some pressure in my ears, my chest and in my head. I prayed and Jesus gave me relief. I got into bed again and
Irene realized I had got in but then she found me out again on my knees at about a quarter to five.

She asked me what was wrong. I said, “I still feel that pressure in my head and my ears. I suppose there’s a little pressure down my arms but I’m not very aware of it. I don’t seem to be able to get relief now. It seems to be getting worse and it seems to be getting out of control.” And that’s when I felt it was a pressure (I could hardly even call it pain) but a pressure or a strain that was beginning to build out of control. Over the past years even though I had approaches to this kind of feeling, I hadn’t had it as bad as this.

So Irene said, “Do you think we should go to the hospital?” And I was ready to go to the hospital by that time. I said, “Yes, I think we should.” We got into the car about 5:30 AM. The roads were pretty clear as we headed down to the hospital in Raleigh. At one point I remember Irene said to me, “Why did you do that?” I had put the hazard light on in the car and she said, “Why do you do that?” And I said, “Because I can’t wait any longer we better get there fast.” We were stuck at a stop light.

Anyway, we ended up at the Raleigh Hospital, and went in. They’re dear people and they welcomed us in. I explained the situation. The doctor gave me a nitrite which is apparently for angina and heart strain. That eased it a bit and so we began to feel that maybe this wasn’t anything big. He took a few more details and they then did an EKG which is putting little plugs on you all over to check the heart, the activity of the heart, the electrical activity of the heart.

The results looked alright, dead on. And so they generally felt, “Maybe this is just a little angina you’ve had and it isn’t very serious. We’ll give you something for it, you’ll have to take care a little but you’ll be okay.” And so that’s the way it was set. And that’s where I’d like to make plain to all of us the miracle of timing. It was a miracle of God’s timing because at that moment we could have just as easily gone home. I was there on the bed in the Raleigh Hospital and they had the EKG on me.

The tension or the strain rose again inside me and at that time I think a cardiologist had come by because the doctor said, “Well, you could go home but we have a cardiologist who will be by here in an hour so you might as well stay on.” And so I stayed on even though I could easily have gone home. The doctor sent the cardiologist over and he is watching the EKG at the very time that this pressure or tension rises.

He contacted Irene who had gone back to the office to open things up and get the business going. He said, “I think you should come by because I see something strange on the EKG and it doesn’t look normal. Come by and we’ll talk it over.” So Irene came by and they talked it over. He said, “I would normally say, ‘let’s watch him all day.’ But, it is coming to the weekend and I hate to do that because on the weekend there’ll be nothing we can do and I’m going off for the weekend. So I think we should do a catheterization.”

Catheterization is putting a tube in your thigh area with a little telescope. It goes up your artery and into your heart. They can actually look and see what’s happening to know what the situation is.

The doctor said, “Normally you have to line up for this thing but it so happens that there’s an opening right now at the big hospital he calls it – The Wake Heart Institute across the state. There’s a spot and we could get you in right in now.” That’s why I think it’s the Father’s timing. So before I know it, we’ve agreed upon that and I’m on a trolley into another ambulance. Three
people are monitoring me and the heart is now beginning to defibrillate -- which is a fluttering
like that.

They were calling to the other hospital and saying, “The heart’s in defibrillation, da-da-da.”
After about 20 minutes we got there and the catheterization team was ready to go right away.
Everything was going like a ballet. In fact, the cardiologist said several times to us, “It doesn’t
normally go like this. It doesn’t normally go like this.” But everything just went smoothly. I
went straight to catheterization. They had that ready.

They started to it, while Irene met with another cardiologist there at the Heart Institute. He said,
“This is probably nothing. We’ll probably go in, have a look and we might see maybe a little
occlusion. You know the way the cholesterol closes down the arteries. We might see a little
occlusion in one of the arteries that supplies the muscle of the heart -- not the heart itself
because the heartbeat seems strong. But we might see something there, have to put a balloon up so
as to open it out and then you’ll be home by the weekend.”

The cardiologist came out after 15 or 20 minutes and he said, “O’Neill”? And of course Irene stood
up. He said, “This is very serious. One artery is 95% blocked another artery is 90% blocked and the
third is 85% blocked. The back one is clear, it’s clean but it’s very serious. There could be a
catastrophic heart attack.”

So he said, “We have to do something right away.” Irene is sharp and knows about medical things and
she says, “Bypass?” And he says, “Yes, we’re prepping him now. There’s a surgeon standing by. ”
This was miraculous because he was set to do an operation but that operation was cancelled.

God’s goodness is what amazes me. It was God’s kindness because the whole thing was just set.
Irene said, “Yes, let’s go for it.” Then of course they go immediately into action. He had great
love and sympathy for Irene and said, “If you want to see him he’ll be going by like the queen.
He’ll be going by at this corner.”

Irene saw me as I was going by and said, “It’ll be okay. Everything will be okay.” And I said,
“Yes this side or the other.” But Jesus gave us great peace and great rest.
It is the enormity of the situation that day that makes me weak now rather than any sorrow, or fear,
or terror -- because we didn’t have any. Jesus just made everything so dead easy. I went into the
operating theater and shifted myself over from the table because I felt for the nurses trying to
lift me.

They put a catheterization tube in and showed me my own heart on a little screen. They showed me a
photograph of my own heart and I could see the thing. I think the amazing thing was it wasn’t the
heart itself. The heart itself seemed to be in good shape and all through it he said, “You’re in
good shape. Your breathing is great, your lungs are great. But the muscle of the heart is fed by
four blood vessels and one of them is absolutely great but the other three are almost completely
blocked. What we have to do is take an artery out of your leg with two round the back of the heart
and replace those three. And that’s what we’ll do and it will take four hours.”

And so they just went to it and that was it. That’s all the fun and wonder of it because all the
rest is just the misery of the post op thing. Anyway that was Friday night. So I was out on Friday
night. I couldn’t talk because they put tubes down your throat which is why I’m a little horse.
They put tubes down the throat so you can breathe and then you’re full of all kinds of other tubes.
They obviously split you open so you have to drain all that. You’re obviously quite a mess with pipes coming out your plumbing. I think a miracle after the operation.

But anyway Irene saw me on Saturday and we could talk to each other. Then Sunday she brought the computer up and I did some computer work. And Monday we got a little better. Monday I was walking around the hospital. Tuesday was the last day and Wednesday I came home. And here I am gloriously, almost within a week.

I’m walking a mile three times a day. Oh yes, and those of you who wonder, “Yes, but will the poor old guy make it for much longer?” We asked him. I said, “Well, in a way I suppose it’s as good as new?” And he said, “It’s better than new. It’s better than new because the arteries you had were filled up with cholesterol and had been filled up over years and years. Now you have three absolutely new ones, clean ones, and you have the other one that was not blocked at all.” And that’s why I say, “And I will give you a new heart.”

If you say to me, “Well, the pastor didn’t come and lay his hand upon you and say, ‘In the name of Jesus be healed.’” No, but would I be alive today if everything had not worked exactly as it did? I don’t have any doubt; no doubt, that if the timing had not gone as it did I would not be here. It was God’s miracle. Finally, you must admit that what this man did was sew the arteries around on to the heart. He sewed this up, that’s all he does. It is the Savior’s heart and whole new body that fills in here.

I go back to him in two or three weeks time and he’ll hardly be able to see my stitches. He’ll hardly be able to tell that anything has been disturbed in here and yet he hasn’t done anything to it since he operated last week. He hasn’t done anything. It is Jesus’ body that has filled in here.

I wanted to share this because I want us to be real about our attitude to Jesus and our trust in him to every practical situation. But I wanted to share this especially so that you might be able to see what I was beginning to see that it’s a miracle whether the surgeon does it and we happen to understand it or whether it is done by God and we don’t even know about it. It is God that does it all the time.

I can understand John Wesley through all kinds of heart aches and pains -- we don’t know what kinds of miracles God did in him when the surgeons did not know enough to do it. Now the surgeons know a little more and they are able to do some of the things that God has taught them. But it is still the Father that arranges everything so that things fall in line exactly.

I’m very aware that God intended us to continue as a family together, and with me as part of it. As long as God wants us to be here and to be together, we will be together. He will insure that, however he has to do that, however he has to manipulate this operation that has to be done or this surgeon that must be on hand, or this man that happens to notice a little thing or this person that happens to say that little thing. God will insure that all falls right for our sales, and for all hundreds of things needed.

God will be faithful. He will continue to apply the miracles of Jesus to us in a way that we need at that time. He will do that not only for our physical hearts and health but he will do it for our clean hearts – so that we are clean inside, so that we can love as he loves and obey as he obeys. He will do this so that the Lord Jesus will be lived fully in you and me.
It’s just a wonder, a great joy and delight, with all the fuss here – it’s a great reassurance for all of us in Christian Corps that God is saying, “I know you’re there, I know what you are doing, I know what you need and it will be there. Everything you need, every miracle that you need I will do, on time and without fail. You can depend upon it.

And you know, I don’t have to do anything except take 2 baby aspirins a day and go to lots of movies my wife says. I’ve been back swimming and I seem to have no limitations. I’m hoping now that the jet lag will be no problem as I think the sleep problem came from the deteriorating heart rather than from the jet lag. So, I’m looking forward to being with all of you. Let us pray.