

Heart of Stone

(Ezekiel 11:14-21)

Yearly Theme: *“Kindness is... Advancement”*

Series Title: *“Kindness in Exile”*

July 2nd, 2023

Something to think about:

As we begin a new series today, we will be looking at the exiled Jews in the prophecies of Ezekiel in the Old Testament. Where we pick up the narrative today is in chapter 11. But before we get there, we need a little backstory.

After King Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonian Empire had come into the land of Judah and conquered it, he took the remaining Jewish inhabitants of the land and sent them in small groups throughout the whole empire in order to subdue them. However, there were some who remained behind. In addition to this, the city of Jerusalem remained intact along with the Temple (at least for a few years more). Those who still remained in Jerusalem began to believe that it was only the exiles who were being punished, and not themselves. They believed that the reason they were left behind was that GOD approved of them and their behavior, thus giving them the land of their former countrymen as a reward. But this wasn't true, and GOD would have Ezekiel speak not only to the remaining Jews in Jerusalem but also to the exiles in the land of Babylon in order to set the record straight as to what GOD was really doing behind the scenes.

Turn in your Bible to: *Ezekiel 11:14-21*

Both groups were under the same judgment, thus both groups needed mercy and grace from GOD. It would take nothing less than a softening of their hardened hearts before a return to the land and restoration of Jewish culture would occur. Here's the point...

Key Point: *“It takes GOD to transform a heart of stone into a heart of flesh.”*

Though there are several things going on in this passage, we need to take a look at the crux of the issue with regard to the definition of right and wrong, as well as the meaning of redemption. In doing so, we encounter several points that rise to the top.

The first thing we encounter is a situation where those who remained in Judah (those who were not exiled) thought that GOD was blessing them while punishing those who had been exiled. This leads us to the obvious debate on...

- _____ vs. _____.
Ezekiel 11:14-15 (NLT), ¹⁴ Then this message came to me from the LORD: ¹⁵ “Son of man, the people still left in Jerusalem are talking about you and your relatives and all the people of Israel who are in exile. They are saying, ‘Those people are far away from the LORD, so now he has given their land to us!’

As a counter to the false narrative that those who were exiled were being punished while those left behind in Jerusalem were being rewarded, GOD reminded the exiles who were far from home that...

- **GOD is a _____ to His people.**

Ezekiel 11:16 (NLT), “Therefore, tell the exiles, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Although I have scattered you in the countries of the world, I will be a sanctuary to you during your time in exile.

Finally, after the season of judgment and punishment came to an end, GOD promised His people that they would return and be changed people:

- **GOD changes _____ hearts into _____, _____ hearts.**

Ezekiel 11:18-20 (NLT), ¹⁸ “When the people return to their homeland, they will remove every trace of their vile images and detestable idols. ¹⁹ And I will give them singleness of heart and put a new spirit within them. I will take away their stony, stubborn heart and give them a tender, responsive heart, ²⁰ so they will obey my decrees and regulations. Then they will truly be my people, and I will be their God.

Something to take home:

“In 2010, Sandra Bullock won an academy award for Best Actress for her portrayal of Leigh Ann Tuohy in the movie: ‘The Blind Side.’ The film chronicles a Christian family who took in a homeless young man and gave him the chance to reach his God-given potential. Michael Oher not only dodged the hopelessness of his dysfunctional inner-city upbringing but became the first-round NFL draft pick for the Baltimore Ravens in 2009. At a fund-raiser, Sean Tuohy noted that the transformation of his family and Michael all started with two words.

“When they spotted Michael walking along the road on a cold November morning (the movie depicts it as nighttime) in shorts and a T-shirt, Leigh Ann Tuohy uttered two words that changed their world. She told Sean, ‘Turn around.’ They turned the car around, put Michael in their warm vehicle, and ultimately adopted him into their family.

“Those same two words can change anyone's life. When we turn around, we change directions and begin an exciting new journey. Some may need to make an about-face concerning their disbelief in Christ, or it could be a Christian needs to turn around and reconsider the value of fervent prayer. Whatever your situation, a great story of wonderful change could be just two words away.”¹

It's time to turn around. It's time to let go of the past, let go of your future, and embrace the reality of Christ in this present moment. It's time to face the reality of your situation and realize that only Christ can transform it and you through the power of His Holy Spirit. If you've become hardened and immovable, if your heart and your feet are like stone, allow GOD to transform your heart of stone into a tender, responsive heart of flesh.

Key Point: *“It takes GOD to transform a heart of stone into a heart of flesh.”*

¹ Source: *In Other Words*.