

WHAT WE LEARN FROM A RABBI!

Steps to a New Life:

Romans 10: 1-15

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Bethany Church

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This is the last day of Sunday School. We will sorely miss some of the interaction that happens with the children. Years ago I heard some Sunday School children singing *Amen Brother Amen*. Later a little girl strolled down the hallway singing, “Peanut butter, peanut butter, peanut butter, amen.” I thought I can celebrate peanut butter. Little children greet life with such excitement as they explore their world in innocence. They make lots of mistakes, but they warm our hearts. Their hearts have yet to be hardened and heavily burdened by the temptations and assaults of the evil one. Their freedom and innocence cheer us up and warm our hearts.

That is like the new life God offers us in Christ. It removes those heavy burdens we carry. It softens the heart that gets cold and hard. Listen to the words of Jesus:

Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28, NLT)

God has a new life for you where you do not agonize with heavy burdens. He wants you skipping along like that child who was singing about peanut butter. No parents who love their children would want anything different for their children. Similarly, your heavenly father wants you walking with joy in celebration. That won't happen if you are carrying a heavy burden. Whether it is guilt, regret, anger or concern, you are not meant to carry that. Jesus will show you

what to carry. You have a job. You have a divine work for which you were created and designed. That work will not drag you down. It will energize you. It will fill you with meaning, purpose and excitement. A central part of that work is walking with your heavenly father who created you and loves you. Jesus restores that relationship.

God also has a new life for you where your heart becomes soft, sensitive and Christ-like.

Through the prophet Ezekiel, God promised:

I will give them singleness of heart and put a new spirit within them. I will take away their hearts of stone and give them tender hearts instead, so they will obey my laws and regulations. Then they will truly be my people, and I will be their God. (Ezekiel 11:19-20, NLT)

Again God spoke through Ezekiel.

I will give you a new heart with new and right desires, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony heart of sin and give you a new, obedient heart. And I will put my Spirit in you so you will obey my laws and do whatever I command. (Ezekiel 36:26-27, NLT)

In these prophecies God promises to replace stony hearts with tender ones and an old wayward spirit with a new obedient spirit, specifically God's Spirit. Do you know what comes from a brand new heart? A brand new life! A brand new future! A brand new destiny! Innocence and optimism are natural for many young children because their hearts have not yet experienced much of Satan's assault. For Jesus innocence or in its mature form – purity and optimism or in its developed state – confidence were natural. They were and are natural for him because Satan had no hold on him. He operated in the Spirit of God and was full of the Spirit of grace and truth. His sinless and obedient life was produced by that. The chief step to an amazing new life is receiving a new heart. We receive a new heart not by a surgeon's skill, but by receiving Jesus' Spirit. When that happens, a new life naturally follows... because you are a new person.

Paul wrote to the Philippian believers who had received a new heart:

God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey him and the power to do what pleases him. (Philippians 2:13, NLT)

A new heart results in two things that shape one's life: a new desire and a new ability.

That is what Ezekiel prophesied, and that is what Jesus brought.

Sadly many Jewish people in Paul's day missed that. Paul as a rabbi was as zealous as any of them in following God's law. Superficially, he and they looked good. They were pious. They were religious. They seemed pretty moral by human standards. Truthfully, however, their families, friends and neighbors suffered from their hardened hearts. Their way of following the law may have seemed righteous to them, but as King Solomon observed in his proverbs, the end of their way was death (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

The Jewish Rabbi Paul discovered that you can not achieve a right relationship with God. In that pursuit even your zeal will betray you. He found himself zealously persecuting God's son in the name of righteousness. He found his heart and life full of violence despite his dedication to living a righteous life. The problem is not zeal. Zeal or enthusiasm properly directed is a work of God. It is part of God's nature to be zealous and enthusiastic. God said that many of his promises would be accomplished through zeal. The problem was not zeal, but a deceived heart.

Adding to that are two things people drastically underestimate. First, we fail to appreciate the extent to which Satan deceives, corrupts, blinds and dominates the minds, hearts and actions of human beings. We want to deny, diminish and minimize the evil at work in our lives. As a human race we live like a bunch of addicts supporting one another in our destructive habits until we get too wounded to ignore it. We prefer to see ourselves as victims rather than as perpetrators. An African proverb states that the one who punches quickly forgets, but the one punched never forgets.

Do you remember how we talked earlier of those optimistic, innocent little children? Solomon observed, *“Folly is bound up in the heart of a child”* (Proverb 22:15, NIV), and by the end of middle school most children will have suffered unspeakable cruelties from their peers, cruelties that they will remember for life. They will have been demeaned, belittled and violated verbally and physically. Most also will have done that same thing to others and quickly forgotten. Some youngsters don’t cope very well. Bitterness overtakes them, and that leads to death. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold dramatically demonstrated that in Columbine High School.

The Bible doesn’t suggest humanity needs a little tweaking here and there. If that was all it took, people could just be provided information and their marriages would be reconciled. Provide a pamphlet or video and their addictions would end, their health habits would improve and their relationships would be restored. World peace would be a doctoral dissertation away. The Bible claims that evil has so dramatically gripped our heads and our hearts that we desperately need salvation. Isaiah wrote:

We are all infected and impure with sin. When we proudly display our righteous deeds, we find they are but filthy rags. (Isaiah 64:6, NLT)

Unfortunately, until we come to see this hopeless situation, we don’t look for a savior. We just expend more effort in defining and arriving at our own sense of righteousness. That is why Paul as a Jewish rabbi was so heart broken. People kept saying, “I’m okay. Look at how I observe God’s law.” Meanwhile, their attitudes and actions separate them from God and harm those around them.

In his letter to the Roman Christians, Paul laid out the devastating effects of sin upon all humanity. He wrote of how we all sin, how we all are trapped by its power and how despite our best efforts we merit judgment and death. However, Paul also wrote about the generosity of God

who loves us. He wrote about God's love and work on our behalf. He wrote about the mercy and power of God to forgive and free us.

The second thing we terribly underestimate is God. God's love and power is greater than sin and its grip on humanity. God's love and power is not merely equal; it is up to and greater than every human hurt and every human need. God can not only heal and meet our needs; he can also work in us so that we reveal his awesome glory. We can become testaments of his love, windows to his righteousness and exhibits of his power. Indeed, that is his plan for you and me. That doesn't happen by trying to be good. That doesn't happen by following some standard of righteousness. Paul counted all of his own efforts in that pursuit to be garbage. No this change comes from a new heart that is received in repentance and faith.

Listen to Paul's words.

For if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved. (Romans 10:9-10, NLT)

This rabbi knew that there were two important steps to a new life. One was quiet; the other was noisy. One step called upon Christ as Lord and Savior. The other was an inward decision that Jesus is actually who he said he is. God did raise him from the dead. He is our hope. When you make the decision to accept Jesus for who he is and call upon him, he responds. He comes with his Spirit. He will overwhelm you with this Spirit if you are receptive. You will experience forgiveness, passion, peace, and joy. Your fearful heart will be at rest. As you rely on his forgiveness, he'll give you a tenderness and patience for others. He'll produce in you the very things you have struggled so long to achieve.

Do you want that? That is what this rabbi discovered and shared. This new heart and new life is for you. Believe and call today.