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Reformed Presbyterian Church
Lord's Day Morning
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'Renewing Your Hearts and Vision' Series
#1

"Renewing our Hearts" Ezekiel 36:22-38

Introduction

Preaching Series - *Summer and Fall of 2008*

Renewing Your Hearts and Vision

Doctrines That Will Change Your Life

1. Election – Living securely when I am weak
2. Sovereignty of God – Living with confidence in an unstable world
3. The Reality of Hell – Living in the Fear of the Lord
4. The Reality of Heaven – Living with hope instead of despair
5. The Church as the Body of Christ – Living in Community
6. Presbyterianism – Living by faith in Jesus' Church
7. Infant Baptism – Better than dedication
8. The Lord's Supper – The banquet table of God
9. Adoption – The Sweet Reality of Belonging
10. Forgiveness – Just how clean?

Things God Hates (Proverbs 6:16)

1. Haughty Eyes
2. A Lying Tongue
3. Hands that Shed Innocent Blood
4. A Heart Devising Evil Plans
5. Feet Drawn to Evil
6. A False Witness
7. One Who Spreads Strife

Things God Loves

1. A Cheerful Giver
2. The World
3. His People
4. A Joyful Worshiper (focus on the Sabbath Day)

Starting today:

Renewing Your Hearts and Vision

1. Renewing our Hearts (Ezekiel 36)
2. Renewing our Vision (A look at our purpose statement)
3. Renewing our Outreach (Friendship evangelism; new outreach mailing)
4. Renewing our Hospitality (opening our homes and our hearts to others)
5. Renewing our Marriages (how to become one flesh)
6. Renewing our Families (raising our sons and daughters)
7. Renewing our Fellowship (what is fellowship; keeping a clear conscience; commitment to the body of Christ)
8. Renewing our Personal Ministry (use of gifts; commitment to discipling and mentoring; availability to serve)

Why a series on renewal?

1. We need it right now. (We are still church planting.)
2. We always need it.
 - a. Until we are perfected, we will constantly need renewal to restore us, to bring us back to the places and things God has for us. We are prone to wander.

We need renewal whenever we are failing to live in a way that completely pleases God.

Today we are going to see that renewal is a work of God where he not only restores us to the places and things He has for us, but He restores and renews our souls in the process.

[Ezekiel 36:22-28]

There are several things that can put a man or woman in a position that he/she needs renewal.

1. Rebellion against God the discipline of God – Ezekiel's audience. In captivity b/c of sin.

2. Weariness – Whether because of strenuous work, extensive battles being fought, or overwhelming suffering, sometimes man reaches a point of exhaustion, either physically or in his soul, so that he simply needs a strengthening that can only come from God.
3. Discouragement – If things are not going well at home or at work or in life in general, it is possible to be crushed under the weight of discouragement that can't seem to see the end.
4. Distractions – We don't always even recognize this one, but God knows how often we lose sight of our priorities, our vision gets blurred, we forget why we are here and what is important. In such times as these, we need the renewing winds of God's Spirit.

So, how does renewal come? That's where we want to begin today. And this is where Ezekiel can help us. Let me reiterate what I said a moment ago. Renewal is a work of God's grace that restores our place and our soul. Ezekiel shows us some important principles of renewal. Here are seven.

- I. When God brings renewal, He is motivated by His own glory. (Read vs. 22 & 23)

Our starting point is usually self – we get motivated by our own needs, desires and wants. If we are broken down we want relief.

But God is most passionate about His own glory. At the risk of offending you, let me just say that God cares more about His own glory than He does about your needs.

Having said that, we must also understand that in the plan of God, He has connected us to Himself so that we were created to glorify His name.

So when we are failing to live the way God desires, we are failing to glorify Him. So then, at the heart of renewal is not first and foremost our comfort and pleasure and profit, but His glory.

So here is God through Ezekiel, reminding the people that because they have not lived the way He desired, they have profaned the name of God among the nations. God is going to bring renewal to His people so that He will *prove Himself holy in their sight*. Verse 24 tells how He will do it. *I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land.*

When God renews you personally, or when He renews us as a congregation, He is motivated by His glory. We are to live for that very purpose. It is our chief end.

II. When God brings renewal, He gives us a new heart. (Read vs. 25 & 26)

Renewal obviously involves cleansing us. But there is more to God's way of cleansing than just washing away dirt.

If you've ever observed a city renewal program, you know that it's possible to clean things up – put on some fresh paint, pour new sidewalks, remove condemned buildings and yet still not make much difference. If the criminals and drug dealers remain it won't be long before no one can tell there ever was a renewal program. There's a man in our own city that is committed to driving around and painting over the graffiti left by gangs. But if the gangs are not dealt with, the process of cleaning will yield no permanent result.

When God brings renewal He works from the inside out. He takes away our heart of stone and gives us a heart of flesh.

Heart of Stone – dead, unresponsive, immovable. If you live in sin too long without repenting, your heart and your conscience will begin to harden. You will stop listening to and caring about the things of God. A heart of stone is tuned into the world, not the Spirit of God.

Heart of Flesh – Flesh, not like Paul uses it to describe sinful desires; but flesh as in living, beating, responsive, warm and listening to God. A heart of flesh hates sin and runs from it.

So learn this promise. Pray this for yourself and your children and our church. Pray that we would be a people marked by hearts that respond to the directions and desires of the Holy Spirit.

III. When God brings renewal, he is fulfilling His eternal promises. (Read vs. 28)

Understand that in spite of the American spirit which tends to view Christianity as something that is just between *God and me*, the reality is we stand in a long line of redemptive history that is much bigger than *me*. Your salvation has a context. God promised right after the fall of Adam and Eve that He would redeem the world through Jesus. He made promises to your forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, that they would be His people and He would be their God.

What does this mean? It means that God is going to be faithful to His promises. It means that in terms of your salvation, God is committed to you and your renewal. You don't have to earn it. It's not something that only a special few Christians can experience. Your renewal is part of God's work in your life. God will renew you because God chose to save you.

So God promises to *give strength to the weary and to him who lacks might He will increase*

power. He will make you mount up with wings like eagles. (Isaiah 40:29)

He also says I will strengthen you; surely I will help you; surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand. (Isa. 41:10)

Jesus said, Come to Me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. (Matt. 11:28)

IV. When God brings renewal, He pours out blessing on you. (Read vs. 29-30)

While it is true that we don't start with self – our wants, desires and pleasures – that doesn't mean God doesn't bless His people when He restores and renews them. We are not talking about a "health and wealth" gospel. Being a Christian doesn't mean material wealth or an absence of suffering. But He is promising you a life of fruitfulness. In Christ, you will be productive. Doing what God has called and created you to do is at the heart of renewal. If you are engaged in God's purposes, you can expect God's results – big or small. God multiplies the gifts and efforts of those who offer them to Him.

V. When God brings renewal, he brings a desire for righteousness. (Read vs. 31 & 32)

It's interesting that God says that renewal will result in us remembering our evil ways and deeds. Or that's kind of what He says. More precisely He says that we will remember that these things were not good. And we will loathe or hate what we've done.

In light of the fact that Isaiah 43:25 tells us that God will *wipe out our transgressions and not remember our sins*; coupled with Paul's teaching that we are to *forget what lies behind and press on toward what lies ahead*; we need to understand what God is telling us here.

When God renews us, He does so in such a way that we learn and keep the lessons of our life's journeys. We are not bound and enslaved to past sins – those are forgiven and put away – in that sense, forgotten. But the lessons of the past – our sins, our sufferings; our weariness – those things we do well to remember.

Renewal then, in part, is God helping us to see clearly where we have just traveled and why we were there, so that we might move into the future with more wisdom and a deeper longing for what is righteous and holy and honoring to God.

This Thursday evening a group of us that just completed the 2:7 Series are going to gather here for 3 hours of time alone with God. It's those extended times of prayer and meditation that God often uses to bring a renewing perspective to where we have been. (If you would like to join us you would be very welcome – 6:00).

VI. When God brings renewal, he makes us attractive to others. (Read vs. 33-36)

In II Cor. 2:12 Paul wrote, *But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life.*

When we are living just like the world, the world leaves us alone and hardly notices us. But when genuine change and revival occur and the blessing of God rests on us; and we get serious about righteousness, *the nations that are left round about you will know that I, the Lord, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted that which was desolate.*

VII. When the Lord brings renewal, He gives a vision for His Kingdom. (vs. 37 & 38)

Genuine renewal will always be reflected in the prayers of those renewed. What do you pray for?

Look at what the people here began to ask God for. People! That the people of God would fill the cities. During the appointed feast in Jerusalem the city would be overflowing with sheep. We witnessed this in Amman, Jordan. Even though it was on the occasion of a Muslim holy day, we experience what happens when everyone is getting ready to offer a sacrifice. Sheep are everywhere.

This is the prayer of God's people. That the cities would be overflowing with people. We rightly need to pray for people. It is not wrong to ask God to bring people to us. More people means more ministry of the gospel and more transformed lives. We pray for God to bring us more people, not so that we look good, but so that God is glorified and His Kingdom is built. We need to pray for conversions. For people to disciple. For laborers to train and send out. Renewal of the heart always brings renewed vision for God's work

So I want to encourage you today to ask God to renew you. No matter what may cause you to wander from God's place and purpose for you, if you have wandered, even a little bit, will you ask God to bring you back? He will delight in that prayer – for the sake of His glory - and your good.