

1

EVERYTHING'S COMING UP NEW

Bible Reading: Ezekiel 36:24-28

A new heart . . . will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you (v. 26).

Marian sighed as she looked out the window.
Monday morning—and here I am in the same old rut.

Do you ever feel you're in some kind of rut? Maybe we all do at times, even though we know that this is no part of God's plan for us. God is not the creator of ruts. Rather, He promises us a whole series of new things: new experiences, new paths to travel with Him, all of which have their beginnings with His free offer of a new heart and a new spirit.

A new heart. The cynic of today might argue, "But modern medical skill and knowledge are capable of giving anyone a new heart."

Our reply could be, “Yes. You may be able to get a new heart *if* . . .

you are a medically viable candidate
your insurance covers the cost
you are willing to risk the percentages

—and even then there is no guarantee.”

We need to keep in mind, also, that there is much more than a “medical cure” inherent in God’s offer. This new heart means a total change: “Old things are passed away; behold all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Note, too, that this is a twofold offer: new heart, new spirit. Not even the most dedicated, the most highly skilled and experienced surgeon can implant a new *spirit* in his patient!

Here is another new thing we are promised in God’s Word: a new *song* (Psalm 40:3).

You may not be a soloist or even a member of the choir, but one day you will be, if you have this new heart.

I recall a chorus we used to sing:

I have a song in my heart today,
Something I never had.
Jesus has come, and my cup overruns;
Oh, say, but I’m glad.

For the soul-inspiring words of the song we will join in when we reach heaven, see Revelation 5:9-13.

It would take more than this whole little book to talk about all the new things—both in this life and the life to come—that God has in store for the new in heart.

How do we get this new heart?

We have to *want* it. We have to be dissatisfied with having a sin-prone heart—and we have to confess this to God and ask Him to forgive us for Jesus' sake.

Only then will we have a new heart and a new spirit that will put a new song on our lips, and that will make us recipients of God's mercies that are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22-23).

2

TAPPING INTO OUR LEGACY

Bible Reading: John 14:25-29

Peace I leave with you. . . . Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (v. 27).

The Lord Jesus had just talked with His disciples about His imminent departure from them. Well He knew that turbulent days lay ahead of them in a hostile world. To encourage their hearts, and as a bulwark against the evil days, He gave them the promise of a special legacy: *peace*. This was not just any kind of peace—it was His peace, a peace such as the world had never known.

And the wonderful thing about this peace is that you and I, His blood-bought children, are co-heirs of this legacy.

I was reminded that this asset is mine as, just a few days ago on a transatlantic flight, the red

“Fasten your safety belt” sign blinked on, and the captain issued his warning of turbulence ahead. I immediately tensed with fear, even though I had never encountered a really frightening experience in the air. Then the words came to me, as though spoken by the Lord Himself, “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” How reassuring it was to realize that those are *His* words, not just those of one neighbor saying to another, “Don’t be afraid; there’s really nothing to be afraid of.” I’m not putting down such well-intentioned words. We should be ready to offer comfort and aid whenever we can. But no matter how sincere we are, we may be quite unable to do anything to alleviate another’s fears. The words of Jesus, by contrast, carry with them the power to banish our worst anxieties and replace them with His peace.

Another benefit of this legacy of peace is that it will never be all used up. I know a woman who for many years looked forward to a promised legacy.

Sadly, when the would-be benefactor died, there was barely enough to pay final expenses and attorney’s fees. For the Christian there can never be such disappointment. Whatever our need for peace, however often we lay claim to our promised legacy, there will always be an abundant supply.

Another gratifying result of living on this legacy is that it adds solid weight to our credibility as Christians. The non-Christians around us have their own problems; they don't need us adding ours. Oh, we all have problems, and always will in this world. But we know where to take ours, and the resultant tranquillity of spirit we enjoy can speak volumes to those around us for whom we may be praying.

What better way to share an inheritance?

3

THINGS GO BETTER WITH THANKS

Bible Reading: Ephesians 5:15-20

I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth (Psalm 34:1).

Joan and Eileen were commiserating with one another in their aloneness. Joan, a recently widowed young woman, badly needed someone who would really listen to her minutely detailed accounts of her husband's sudden death. Eileen, whose husband had left her for another woman, gently interjected, "And some people are telling me, as they probably tell you, 'Just thank the Lord and keep on going.' " Should you thank God for the death of the one who means everything to you—the awful finality of it, the loss of lover, protector, provider, daily companion, and partner in life's adventures?

Thank God for divorce or desertion—the emotional clobbering, the ego-shattering, the feelings of failure and guilt, in addition to the practical ramifications—thank Him for all of these? Yes, if we would heed what the Bible teaches.

It is Bible truth; nevertheless few Christians, while they are going through a severe trial, want to be told to “just praise the Lord.” Nor will a sensitive fellow believer spray around such phrases at such a time.

It takes a powerful measure of spiritual maturity to ride the waves when you lose your husband. Most people flounder, for a while at least, and possibly the last thing they want to hear is platitudes such as “praise the Lord.” Even so, things do go better with *thanks*.

There are at least two reasons this is so. First, the Bible bids us: “In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God . . . concerning you” (1 Thesalonians 5:18). Second, God has promised to be with us in trouble (Psalm 91:15), so we can thank Him for this. The heart of the matter is that we thank God because, as believers in Him, it is the right thing to do, and obedience is its own reward.

I wouldn't pretend to know *how* praise and thanksgiving work; I just know they do. I tend not to be analytical about the things that work for me; I'm just thankful for them. After all, what differ-

ence would it make if we did understand all about what makes things “tick”? Would that make them more effective? If we were restricted in daily life solely to the use and enjoyment of things we wholly understand, what a narrow experience that would be, to say nothing of the advantages we would have to forego. For example, what do we understand about electricity? All *I* know about it is that it dispels darkness, makes the temperature bearable, and performs innumerable other services—even though I’m totally ignorant of how it works!

In like manner I’m ignorant of how the Spirit operates in my life, but as I learn to trust Him, I’m finding out that everything goes better with thanks.

4

THERE ARE NO SILLY QUESTIONS

Bible Reading: John 14:5-9, 22-26

Jesus answered him (John 13:36, 38).

I am not a compulsive seminar attendee, nevertheless I recognize that some have been valuable to me. In one, the leader prefaced his discussion period with, "Remember, there is no such thing as a silly question."

What a freeing concept, I thought, and such a practical thing for a mother to keep in mind.

Questions are here to be handled, whether we like them or not; and who among us has not at times been weary of the eternal why, why, why?

We do have alternatives when someone comes at us with questions. We can turn them off with, "What a silly question!" Or we can just listen (frequently the question itself is a bid for attention, as

we all know), or we can give their question our best shot.

It pays not to fudge. If we don't know the answer, there's nothing wrong with an honest, "I don't know the answer to this one, son." The child will appreciate our honesty. And imagine—something Mom doesn't know! Then we can go the next step and learn together. (Isn't that what all those wonderful encyclopedias are for?) And there's something warm and companionable about two heads over one book. It may be, in days to come when the particular piece of knowledge comes into use for them, your son and daughter will remember that Mother took time to search for it with them.

In addition, the response with which his questions are met at home will shape a child's thinking as to the worth of asking other adults for helpful information. For example, if Mary's mother always turns her off and never makes an attempt to answer her questions, this girl will undoubtedly grow up thinking, *What's the use of asking? They never tell you anything.* And this attitude will include others besides her parents. How much this girl will miss through the years!

I will always be grateful to the seminar speaker who showed me that there are no silly questions.

That makes me ponder how much we are indebted to the disciples and their questions of the Lord Jesus as they walked together. Jesus did not turn from them; nor did He consider their questions silly or trivial. He answered as He alone could, and today in the gospels we can read and be blessed by His answers.