

## **Being Made New, Part 2**

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Isaiah 40:27-31

Ezekiel 11:14-20

Today's message is a very straight forward message. It is not complicated, however the reality behind it is actually quite profound.

In short, the message is that God desires to renew us, and make us new when we are tired, weary and beaten down.

More than this, God is able to do it!

I'd like to share a few reflections on what two different prophets from long ago wrote that was true about God then as it is true about God today.

One of these prophets was a man named Ezekiel and the other a man named Isaiah.

Shelley read a passage from Ezekiel earlier.

Ezekiel was an Israelite priest who became a prophet in the later 500s BC, during the time when Judah (the Israelites' home which including Jerusalem) was defeated by a man named Nebuchadnezzar

of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar took many prominent Israelites captive to Babylon including Ezekiel.

During this time, Ezekiel spoke out in dramatic fashion, went into a trance, fell down, saw strange things, acted out God's word, and proclaimed a dangerous message to people in both Babylon and to those who remained in Judah. He seemed to be quite well known so people would often seek him out for his wisdom.

Interestingly, due to its heavy content the writing that we know as the book of Ezekiel, in some Jewish traditions, was not permitted for anyone under 30-years-old to read.

Ezekiel was one of those unique individuals who understood the priestly concerns of purity and the need for holiness, and also understood the prophetic concerns such as righteousness, appropriate religious practice, and justice within the life of the people.

The passage that Shelley read earlier was written to those who had been removed from their homeland, who were desperate for a new life beyond the one they currently lived. Their lives had grown cold because they many had lost hope of ever returning to their home or being able to open

their hearts once more to one another and to God.

Do you sometimes feel like you have lost hope — perhaps in work, in a relationship, maybe with your role as a parent?

Have you felt as though you have given your best effort, but it has not been good enough to have what you had hoped? As a result, a piece of you has hardened inside. Have you given up the dream of your youth and relegated yourself to mediocrity?

Have you have given up hope of living free?

Life can do this to us.

Ezekiel spoke to the people who were lost, scattered, and separated from people they loved and the land they loved. But perhaps Ezekiel is also writing to you.

Ezekiel said that God had not forgotten them and would once again bring them back home. More than this, God would unify them and soften their hard hearts both toward one another and toward God.

The language that Ezekiel uses here truly implies that God would give their lives back to them. God would return the fullness of their

humanity and free them to open up their hearts to follow in the pattern that God had designed for them to live.

The people had forgotten, but Ezekiel reminded them of God's profound love, interest, and care for them. God was saying "They shall be my people, and I will be their God."

We all have grown cold in certain ways. We have all tightened up to protect ourselves. We have all been hurt and have shrunk and retreated from life to some degree.

This message is for us.

Imagine today what it might feel like if your heart was fully restored, and made new again. Imagine this as a reality in your life for a moment in this silence.

Another prophet who wrote at the same time into the same set of circumstances as Ezekiel, was a man named Isaiah. Actually there are three different authors of the book of Isaiah. This one is often called Second Isaiah.

Most of Second Isaiah's prophetic work was toward the end of the Israelite's exile in Babylon. He was primarily concerned with consoling the people and reminding them

that God is righteous and holy and still controls their history.

In the midst of a time when the people felt abandoned, Second Isaiah informed them that God would soon free them to return home. Listen to what he wrote.

### **READ ISAIAH 40:27-31**

The reality of life is that we can get weary. We can be faint and our understanding of what is going on around us is so often limited to a narrow vision, especially when under stress, like the Israelites while in exile.

Second Isaiah was reminding them as well as us, that God is not weary. God does not become faint. God's understanding is not limited, but is expansive, and robust, exploring the depths of all things.

This God who brings a fresh and vital spirit to work in our weakened state, provides for us the strength we will need to get through the situations we face.

We sometimes want our answers right now, if not yesterday, but Second Isaiah reminds the people that it is important to wait on God for proper timing, because so many things are out of our control.

And those who are able to surrender to God and wait on God will be restored and will soar free above the situation that holds them captive, like an eagle glides freely above the earth.

Second Isaiah also used the analogy of a runner who normally gets tired after running a while.

Perhaps I am like most runners, I get worn out after a time. This past week, I was able to go out early in the morning and run along the golf cart path of the Shepherd's Hollow Golf Course in Clarkston. There was one very steep hill on that course and it wore me out. I swear it was a 45 degree slope! I did not have the stamina or energy to continue running up that hill. It was simply too much for me. I had to walk, then catch my breath before running further.

Even marathon runners who race a 26.2 mile course, will begin to lose steam around mile 10, but they get their second wind and feel like they can go on forever. But even that second wind will run out, and they hit the wall at maybe mile 24, making the final two miles very difficult.

What is "the wall" you hit in your life?

Imagine being able to break free from the wall, the situations of life that have you bound. Imagine being like a runner who can run up the steepest hill, or further than a marathon without getting tired.

This is not about being a production machine and being able to do more with your time. It isn't about never taking a break, because God also affirms that taking a sabbath break is important.

Instead, these prophets remind us how the power of God can restore our broken and worn out spirit when the difficulties of life have taken away our vitality. God renews us, gives us new life when we trust and wait on God.

We can be renewed and God truly has better days in our future.