

# *The Breath Of Life*

**Bible Reading:**  
**Ezekiel 37: 1-14**  
**John 16: 4b-15**

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Some people just never seem to win - ever notice that?

They're the ones who are just about to go to the park with the kids when the call from work comes that the system went down; or they get "ene mene mini mo'd" into telling mom that the baseball just went through the front window; or they always get stuck with the dish towel after everyone leaves the party.

"Win" just doesn't seem to be part of their vocabulary.

I think that the prophet Ezekiel probably figured he was one of them.

Ezekiel was a priest among the people of Israel during the time that they were exiled in the land of the Chaldeans - modern day Iraq.

It was a discouraging time.

Homes and cities were destroyed.

Families and marriages torn apart.

Culture was ripped to shreds.

Religious observance put on hold.

Ezekiel feels the hand of God come down on his little human shoulder with the call to bring a word of encouragement to these people.

They weren't much in a listening mood.

And he, loser priest, gets the call. Figures.

God assigns Ezekiel to remind the people that they had not been forgotten by their Heavenly Father, that they will be restored, one day.

The Bible records what God calls Ezekiel to say in Ezekiel 36. As you read that chapter, you notice that there is no response, not one word from Ezekiel.

He doesn't want to go.

The job seems so hopeless.

Futile to the point of irrelevance.

So the holy hand of God comes down one more time, and in a vision brings the discouraged priest to a field -  
Join us as we read the vision together -

#### **EZEKIEL 37: 1-14**

What a bizarre scene - Almost too much to stomach!

Hectare upon hectare of scattered bones,

chewed on and picked clean by the wild dogs and vultures.

Dry and brittle.

Up and down the valley God leads Ezekiel,

forcing him to absorb this gruesome death scene.

English translations don't bring it across, but the Hebrew bible hints that this is the valley where the armies of Babylon fought the army of Israel and destroyed them. Ezekiel would have thought back to that.

He would have remembered when he and his fellow citizens had been dragged through this same place as they went into exile.

He would have remembered the weak and the sick from that ragtag band falling by the side of the road, near the by-now bleached skeletons of the dead Israelite soldiers, falling there to die, while the survivors continued on into the living death of exile.

Ezekiel's memory is interrupted by God:

*"Mortal, can these bones live?"*

Must be a trick question. Of course they can't live.

*"O Lord God, you know."*

If it had been up to him they would have left right then.

Too many painful memories.

Nothing that could be done, anyway.

But it **wasn't** up to Ezekiel.

The grip on his shoulder tightens -

*"Prophesy to these bones!"*

And he's told what to say.

With, I'm sure, no small measure of reluctance, the prophet obeys.

*so I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them....."*

I wonder if, as this bizarre scene unfolded, Ezekiel began to feel a bit of hope -

what seemed so much death and doom, finally, some signs of hope!

But then the noise and clanging of bone joining bone ceases,

the dust settles,

and everything is quiet.

The valley is full,

not of scattered bones,

but of dead corpses.

*"there was no breath in them."*

It didn't come together, after all.

And Ezekiel's hope collapses as quickly as it had grown.

Can you feel for Ezekiel?

Here's a man struggling with the relevance of his whole religious world.

He knew his stuff - had been part of it his whole life:

the worship, the teaching, the songs, the ritual

.....but for **what?**

When it came to the crunch, and he reached into his religious grab bag that he had accumulated.....

.....he came up empty.

He had done his best.

Prophesied as loud as he could about what God had in store.

All he had to show for it was a valley full of dead bodies.

No better than the bones.

No life.

Ezekiel's religion seemed so irrelevant at this point.

God still far off.

Everything as dead as it was at the beginning.

Dare we say it.....  
*Pointless?*

Other parts of the Bible tell us that the big question of Israel at this time was:

*Are we just part of past history?  
Is everything just a puff of wind that has vanished?  
Has it all been for nothing, passe, irrelevant?*

Questions that not just Israel, but people through time have asked.

Questions that have echoed through the halls of churches across Canada in the last 10 years or so -

*Does it all really matter?  
Is everything that our grandparents pioneered in faith & hope for nothing?  
The way things are going in our land - has it all been a waste?  
Is our religion becoming irrelevant?*

*It seems so.....*

*.....lifeless.*

Ezekiel's shoulder tightens again.

*The Breath.  
You've forgotten about the Breath, man.  
It's no good without the Breath,  
without the Wind of Life.*

So, Ezekiel opens his mouth one more time.

And God acts.

*I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.*

Ezekiel has had an encounter with the Spirit of the Living God -  
- the Breath of life.

The final words of the prophecy God gave him rang in his mind -

*And you shall know that I am the LORD.....  
then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act.*

Ezekiel **does** know now.

For sure!

He knows that God **DOES** and **WILL** breath life into dead situations.

God **DOES** and **WILL** restore His people, giving back hope.

He has **NOT** forgotten them!

The breath of life has come

to the bones  
to Israel  
to Ezekiel.

When Ezekiel worked with what he had, focused on getting his results, busy with what **HE** was doing and forgetting about the Holy One whose hand was on his shoulder,  
the task remained incomplete.

But when he looked up, and called to the Breath  
when he cried out to the Spirit of God,  
suddenly it was no longer Ezekiel's work.  
It was God's work.  
Results came.  
**Life** came!

Indeed, the prophecy was fulfilled.  
60 years later, God's Spirit caused the Emperor to set Israel free.  
God's Spirit put a burden on the hearts of Jewish leaders, who knit together the dried bones of their  
ruined homeland under divine guidance.

The Breath –  
believers in God  
**never** forget about the Breath!

It's the same Holy Breath-Wind that moved mysteriously across the primordial soup in the fog of pre-history  
breathing life into dead atoms and elements.  
knitting it all together into this marvelous work called the Cosmos;  
the Creation in which we live today.

That's the Holy Breath which Jesus promised would settle on  
and live within His disciples.

Read about that with me -

#### **John 16: 4b - 15**

Jesus calls the Breath - **the Advocate**  
In Greek it is *paraklete*.  
Other English versions call the Breath  
*the Helper*.  
*the Counselor*.

He is the Spirit of Truth.  
He takes the deep and mysterious realities of heaven  
and funnels them to earth.  
He takes what is of the Heavenly Father and of Jesus  
and makes them ours.  
Taking dead religion and making it ring  
With eternal significance  
With life.

Where sorrow fills our hearts  
frustration  
restlessness  
wrong ideas  
He moves in and sets things right.  
removes deadening burdens.  
breathes life and hope and joy.

The Breath -

At the very beginning of the service we heard a dramatic presentation of the event of Pentecost, as recorded in the Bible in Acts 2.

Pentecost Sunday is the day when Christians celebrate God's great breath of life breathed into the dry bones of religious observance and behaviour;  
joining together disconnected people, knitting them into a living, breathing enormous body that stands up with joy before the Lord -  
- the Church.

Pentecost is the ancient feast of Harvest - it was one of the biggest festivals in the life of God's people of Israel, celebrating God as the Giver of Life and fertility, prosperity.

The first and best of the year's harvest was offered to the Creator and Master of the Universe in thanksgiving.

*God of Life - we are what we are only because of Your divine blessing and presence and action. You touched the field and gave life. So we live.*

Pentecost -

The coming of the Breath of Life, the Breath of God

As we said to the children -

Today is the birthday of the Church.  
It is the day of her birth - her coming to life.

People that were disconnected and spiritually dry -  
cultures scattered all over the globe  
languages shattered in the after-effects of Babel,  
dry bones in a valley

are, in an astounding miracle  
a miracle that leaves onlookers saying "*What does this mean?*"  
these dry, disconnected, scattered people are brought together,  
so that all across the globe the word can ring out:

*God so loved the world  
that He sent His one and only Son  
that whoever believes in Him should not perish  
but have everlasting life.*

That Breath of Life

the Ezekiel breath  
continues to move and create today

taking hearts that are scattered  
souls that are dry  
spirits that are lifeless  
and filling them with the new life of God.

It is what Jesus called - *being born again*.

A whole new life.  
Life started all over again.  
The life, and the peace, and the security of God.

An astounding miracle when it happens in one person.  
Even more astounding when it happens  
over and over and over and over again.

Not just in one valley.  
But all around the world.

The Holy Spirit Breath of Life takes what otherwise would be cold dead religion  
and makes it come totally alive;  
takes what otherwise would be stiff, formal churchifying  
and makes it vital communal living in the Presence of God.

Someone said -

Church without the Holy Spirit is like looking at a stained glass window from the outside. We can make  
out the shapes and patterns of the bible stories they depict, but they seem dark, cold, unappealing.  
Until we are brought inside the building and become part of it.

Then we see something utterly amazing.  
The dark, cold, unappealing becomes blazing light.

Or, says Helmut Thieleke, it is like looking at a mother's love from the outside.  
It looks somewhat dull - just a sort of hormone-controlled instinct.

But when we think about our own mother, about the safety of her protection, the warmth of her heart,  
and her loving thoughtfulness, then the picture of "mother" blossoms into warm, full colour.  
We are then seeing mother-love from the "inside."

What we celebrate on Pentecost is that the Holy Spirit leads us into the interior of the reality of heaven where  
everything lights up.

We now cease being cold outsiders.

We become very aware that the Heavenly Father addresses **US** and that **we** are **HIS** children.

We realize that it wasn't just anybody who was nailed to the cross,  
but the Son of God who died for **ME**.

And we **KNOW** that our sins are forgiven  
guilt is removed  
a new life is opened for **US**.

God notices us.  
He calls to us.  
He breaths His life on us - into us.

That's what we celebrate this morning.

And it's what we're called to respond to.

You see, response is needed.

Ezekiel had to prophesy.  
Step out in obedient response to the Lord's command.

The Bible commands us to be filled with the Spirit.

It says that we can also choose to grieve the Spirit; quench the Spirit -  
which means:

get in His way,  
shut Him out,  
suppress His life.

In which case we remain a pile of dead bones, or at best a lifeless religious corpse.

God is asking us to open wide our lives.  
To throw off away all our restraint.  
To say, "**Yes.**"  
To give Him complete room to move and blow through our lives.

And He promises that He **will** come.  
Sometimes in spectacular, Ezekiel-like ways.  
Sometimes quietly in ways that show up slowly over time.

But

He

**WILL**

come.

So join me.

And pray -

*Breath on me, breath of God  
Fill me with life anew  
That I may love the way You love  
And do what you would do.*