

March 29, 2020
Take a Breather, Ezekiel 37:1-14

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus, Christ.

Every single time we inhale, our diaphragms contract and move downward so that the space in our chest cavity increases. The lungs then expand, air is pulled in, and with help of a fancy protein called hemoglobin, oxygen goes to the blood. While this is all going on, carbon dioxide moves into the lungs and is then forced out when we exhale. The whole thing is pretty amazing, and there are hundreds of more details about this thing we call “breathing” that I left out. In our text today, God shows the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel a vision that brings the resurrection of the whole army of Israel! Ezekiel envisions those who were very dead breathing again, physically. But he’s also seeing what breath can mean spiritually. Ezekiel’s vision is a picture of what Jesus does for us: Jesus Gives Us the Breath of Resurrected Life. God’s people haven’t been breathing very well! We have all sorts of things that harm us physically (drugs, food, too much sitting). We have all sorts of things that harm us spiritually (greed for a BMW, a corner office, a better look, a new partner).

This kind of breathing has dried us to the core. Israel breathing all the wrong things has resulted in their destruction and captivity in Babylon. God gives Ezekiel a vision of what that means for them spiritually. It’s as if they are breathless with very dry bones. Ezekiel was forced to take a good look at the situation, just as God’s Law forces us to take a close look at our own condition. We have been taking into our nostrils the breath of death. On our own, we are deep down in the lowest of low places, lying lifeless in the valley of death.

But a breath of fresh air is on the way. It begins with the Word of the Lord. The Word is living and active. And where the Word is, there is also the Spirit. We read again in Ezekiel 37:9, “Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath; Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live”.

We are all conditioned to believe that no one can escape death. According to human experience death is the final act of life. Most people avoid thinking about death. But God wants us to think about it. He wants us to know that death is because of sin. “The wages of sin is death...”

Israel had turned away from God to false religions that worshiped creatures instead of the Creator. They had forgotten the commandments to love their neighbors. And for all of this, God removed them from their land to Babylon and destroyed their temple. So God gave Ezekiel a vision of a valley of dry bones, a valley of death. But God wanted to teach his prophet that death is not the end of life in His world. These bones could live. These people could stand again and serve the Lord. But how?

Would it take some kind of magic? Some kind of secret incantation? No. It would only take the word of the Lord. Just as God's word brought the world into existence in the first place at creation, so here, Ezekiel saw how the word of the Lord brought the dead to life. God told Ezekiel to prophecy, which is really just another way of saying "preach." Preach to the bones the word of the Lord. Preach to Israel the word of the Lord. God showed Ezekiel and us that where the word of the Lord is so is God's Spirit. God wants us to know and believe that the words from Romans 6:23 are sound and true, "But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord". The Word and the Spirit give us back the breath of life. Notice, it's just like the way God created Adam: first he formed him, then he breathed into him the breath of life (Gen 2:7).

Remember how very physical the resurrection was that Ezekiel saw. Just as God showed Ezekiel in the vision the sinews and flesh He lay on the dry bones of Israel to give them life, so now God calls his people to take a breather. The breath that Jesus gives re-creates both soul and body. The breath that Jesus gives reaches even those in the grave (vv 12–13). This breath of resurrected life happens because Jesus gave up his breath on the cross. God keeps His promises. His word and His Spirit bring life from death. We are not to live under the condition that death is the end, that there is no hope.

Are we any different than the people in Ezekiel's time? We are not. We are constantly being conditioned that death will have the last word in this world. Satan wants us to believe that there is no overcoming the consequences of sin. God's word brings hope and life where despair and death would otherwise reign supreme. Only God's word has the power to reverse the inevitable progress of sin, decay and death that are undeniably the stark realities of this life. Sins are forgiven through the blood and the suffering and the death of Jesus."

This is our sure comfort and hope, because "if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you" (Rom 8:11).

Breathing is a big deal, and today God calls us all to receive the breath of resurrected life that comes only from Jesus. So, take a breather! In him is a breath for the weary and heavy-laden, for the crushed in spirit, for the despised and lowly. The breath he gives enters into the deepest dryness of your life and revitalizes who you are beyond all understanding. Yes, in Jesus is a breath of life that extends even beyond the grave, so breathe easy, my friends. Amen. The peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus into life everlasting. Amen.