

Fire, Breeze, Rivers, Trees_Wk2

March 20, 2022

Scripture: Ezekiel 37:1-14; Acts 2:2; Acts 17:24-25; Genesis 2:7; Romans 8:5-9a;

Communicator: Dan Walker

If I were to ask you:

Are you dead or alive? You would likely roll your eyes and smirk...kind of a dumb question. Of course you're alive. You have a pulse, you have breath, you have life.

Let me ask you another question.

Are you spiritually dead, spiritually alive, or spiritually on life support? This may be a little less of an eye roll or smirk and give you more of an **RPF (resting perplexed face)**.

Last question:

Depending on how you answered the second question, where do you want to be?

If you're spiritually alive and vibrant, do you want to experience more of that?

If you're spiritually on life support and barely surviving, do you want to go through the needed soul-saving actions to be brought back to full life?

If you're spiritually dead, are you ready for life?

The message I have for you today is all about life.

Jesus made a statement that was recorded by his disciple, John, where he said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full (John 10:10)."

There are a lot of Christians who know that verse but have never lived it. Your sins have been forgiven, Jesus loves you, he has given you his life in every way...and yet for so many people the idea of having a life that is filled with the fullness of God in every way has seems impossible....or worse, undesirable.

Some of us were raised with a theological framework that was so demoralizing any time we experienced joy in our salvation we felt like weren't doing it right...you should be miserable and you should like it! Suffer for Jesus!

I think there is a different way.

So let me ask you again - do you want life? Do you want the Jesus kind of life? Do you want more of what you've already got?

It happens not through your Bible memorization, although that is helpful.

It happens not through your religious appearances, although living upright lives is helpful.

It happens - listen - as we inhale the oxygen of heaven, the wind of the Spirit.

ILLUSTRATION:

When I was in high school I experienced what was to me the most powerful effect of wind that I have ever seen personally.

The memory is etched in my mind. I was walking through the entryway of my home and I looked out through the door, through the windows of our porch - to see the entire roof of our barn be lifted off the structure and flipped right into our garden. All I can remember was just staring at it wide eyed and dumbfounded. Did that just happen?

Wind is powerful and in reality wind is often destructive.

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM SCRIPTURE:

But throughout the Scriptures see some examples of God using the wind to bring about spiritual and in some cases even physical life.

- Wind - used to save Israel as it parted the Red Sea (Exodus 14)
- Wind - used to destroy the side of a mountain and change Elijah's expectations (1 Kings 19)
- Wind - used to display Jesus power as he calmed a storm (Mark 4)

But what is amazing is that in the Scriptures, both the Old Testament and New Testament, there is a word for wind; and that same word is also used to express something very very important:

SLIDE:

The Hebrew word, *ruach*, means breath, wind, life or spirit.

The Greek words, *pnoe* and *pneuma*, means blowing, wind, breath, or spirit.

When God designed you - you were made in his image and he gave you life, breath, and spirit.

Genesis 2:7 Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

You're familiar with CPR, right? CPR is a way saving someone's *ruach* or *pneuma*, someone's life by doing what?

By breathing your life out so that someone else might take a breath in. It is a life-saving technique and it is powerful and it is intimate in the sense of how close one person is to another.

God breathed his life into you and gave you life. It is powerful. It is intimate. It is intentional. It is purpose filled.

Now that seems all well and good. Yay God!

But as we have discussed over the last few months, we have learned that God's intended life for us was obscured because the first humans gave into their craving for autonomy - the desire to determine for themselves what is right and wrong.

And since then humans have waffled back and forth between being empowered by the *ruach* of God, or being suffocated by the *ruach* of the world - the desire to rule and reign for ourselves.

Over time, the people of God were in deep deep despair.

*Some of you right now, you're in the room physically or online in front of a screen physically, **but your spirit has been suffocated.***

It is as if the very air you breathe has become something that constricts your life.

There are things that suck the life, the pneuma or ruach, out of you and sometimes you don't even realize it.

This is anecdotal based on my own life and observing other people's lives but here a few ways in which the life of God has been sucked out of me or others that I've observed...

1. Escaping reality by satiating our desires with things that don't matter or aren't healthy.

a. Video games / Social Media / News / Streaming services

- i. We are literally addicted to the dopamine hit that comes through headlines, likes, comments, and entertainment.
- ii. This is why, in extreme cases, people are emotionally dead in real life...because real life doesn't meet the same level of the dopamine high's provided by entertainment.

b. Substance abuse: drugs, alcohol, medications, food

- i. We self medicate and end up self-destructing

2. Not admitting that I am broken.

a. Denying the reality that you have a need for healing prevents any possibility of getting better. You can't breathe in the life of God when you are content to breathe in the air of death.

- i. You blame everyone for your problems. If they would change, life would be better.
- ii. Your emotional dysfunction is causing you to be the common denominator in your dysfunctional relationships.
- iii. Your pride and unwillingness to be vulnerable makes you seem cold, unapproachable, and lacking any amount of empathy.

3. Blaming all my problems on my brokenness.

- a. Knowing you are broken in some key areas of life and yet not pursuing any healing at all, while developing a pattern of self-loathing sucks the life that God has given you right out.
- b. Not addressing your lifelessness while at the same time blaming that for all your problems is a sign that the life of God has been sucked right out of you.

There are plenty of other ways to describe ways in which the life of God is sucked out of, and instead we are breathing in the spirit of this world.

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The nation of Israel got so far down this road of lifeless living - living apart from God and apart from his Spirit - that they were sent into a period of darkness.

During that period of darkness God called a prophet named Ezekiel to be his spokesman and to communicate on his behalf. A significant way that God spoke to Ezekiel was through dreams and vivid visions.

The picture is this: The people of God had wandered so far from the life of God that they were like a vast population of dead people...lifeless. There was no vibrancy, no purpose, no hope...and God commissioned Ezekiel to speak a message of prophetic hope to his people.

Here is how Ezekiel remembered and recorded it:

Ezekiel 37

The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. **2** He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. **3** He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

Real quick:

What you perceive with your eyes may not necessarily be a reflection of spiritual realities and it is wise not to presume that our perception is always accurate.

Notice Ezekiel's response:

I said, "Sovereign Lord, you alone know."

4 Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! **5** This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. **6** I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and

cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.”

In other words, God is saying that he is going to BIND PEOPLE back together, restoring them with strength and then what...

I'm going to put breath back into you.

I'm going to restore your spirit.

For what purpose?

Then you will know that I am the Lord...you will know that what has happened did not happen as the result of human will, human effort, good vibes, positive thoughts, living out 'your truth' or one more hit from a drug...

You will know that the life being restored, being breathed out and then breathed in is only from the mouth of God.

There are people in your life that you have written off.

They are too far gone.

You may be that person - thinking to yourself that you're too far gone.

Your soul is all dried up.

I want you to hear this: You might have come here a dead man or woman walking, but you can leave here filled with the Spirit of God who breathes life into your spirit. Who restores your soul.

SLIDE: The breath, or Spirit of God, brings me to life.

Say it out loud. The breath, or Spirit of God, brings me to life.

Are you all dried up? The Spirit of God brings you to life.

Are you controlled by anxiety? The Spirit of God brings you to life.

Are you paralyzed by fear? The Spirit of God brings you to life.

Are you overwhelmed by your sins? The Spirit of God brings you to life!

Ezekiel does what he is told:

7 So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. **8** I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

9 Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" **10** So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

SOME BACKSTORY:

What has happened in Ezekiel's ministry so far, which overlaps with the ministry of the prophets Daniel and Jeremiah is this:

God **warned his people that their choices were resulting in their death.** There would be consequences for rejecting God and those consequences would be in correlation with their sin.

We don't like to talk about sin and consequences, but here's the deal: **God breathed life into you** and established you as a walking, talking, thinking, feeling human being and he also gave you the invitation to live in such a way that life goes better and you are better at life. He filled us with his life.

All of us have rejected it in some way or another. The consequences are natural byproducts of choosing our own way.

But for Ezekiel, as he ministers to the people of **Judah during a period of 70 years where God's people were captive in Babylon, he transitions his message:**

He was declaring disaster.

But now he is declaring restoration.

And as he obeys the command of God he speaks life into this Valley of Dry Bones during this vision from the Spirit of God and as he writes it all down and shares it with the people who are in captivity - they are given hope.

Do you know what happens when you are given hope?

Life.

Life happens.

The light returns to your eyes.

Your countenance changes.

Your posture improves.

Your perspective changes.

Your desire to do what will move further and faster toward hope increases.

But when you hope in the Lord, that hope is magnified.

Do you hope in the Lord?

I mean really hope in him or are you just saying that because you were once told that's what you are supposed to do?

Because here's what happens when dry bones are brought to life - you don't just believe that hope exists, you experience it. You live it.

There are people sitting near you who are living witnesses to this reality.

Ezekiel isn't done yet though. God has even more to communicate in this vision:

11 Then he said to me: "Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.'

Remember just a few minutes ago when I said that one of the reasons the life of God is sucked out of us is because we blame everything on our brokenness...

We can't do what God says because of weaknesses.

We can't change because it's "just the way I am".

What's the point of hoping again when eventually it's all going to come crashing down anyways?

This is the attitude of the people of Israel.

There's no point in living! Our hope is gone! We are cut off from our land, our people, and our God.

And so God says...

12 Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. 13 Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. 14 I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.'

SLIDE: The grave of despair and hopelessness is not so deep that the Spirit, breath, or life of heaven can't reach you.

The bones of your soul might be old and brittle, but your spirit is being resuscitated and life can be restored.

God is breathing life out - he is breathing his Spirit out.

Breath in!

We used to sing the old chorus, "This is the Air I Breathe" - "your holy presence, living in me. And I am desperate for you. I am lost without you."

There are some of you hearing this today - you know you need this life breathed into you. The Spirit of God to restore you and to bring you to life. God is not rejecting you or withholding anything from you, but he is waiting for you to surrender in this moment and call upon him.

You can say it this way if it would help, SLIDE: "Holy Spirit, please breathe life into me today. I'm so weary. I'm so worn out. I'm so beat up. I'm not even sure I know you anymore. Please breathe your life into me so that I might live in you." And just breathe and be still.

Our Father in heaven has promised us as his children that he does not withhold good gifts from his Children. James, Jesus brother, wrote that the reason we lack what we want is because we do not ask God.

So today, ask God to breathe his life into you.

But there is one last thing.

You see, there is a pattern of behavior that humans fall into. It's a pattern of rejecting God's Spirit. We see it first in Genesis, but then we see it over and over again throughout the Scriptures.

It's a pattern, but hear me carefully...the frequency of the cycle doesn't need to be what it has been.

If you realize that you are

I fully believe that as a person regularly submits to the Spirit of God and lives in the Spirit, as the Apostle Paul describes it, we are not bound to life in the vicious cycle of despair or hopelessness.

Romans 8:5 Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. **6** The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. **7** The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. **8** Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

9a You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you.

The purpose of God is to give you life. Jesus made that clear.

Those of you who have surrendered your life to Jesus and have chosen to follow him, you were given the Spirit of God.

But you must choose to walk in the Spirit. This isn't a one time thing where from the moment you were saved you are not set forever.

You must choose to surrender daily to life in the Spirit.

BUt here's the good news. Surrender leads to victory.

When you lay your life down at the feet of Jesus and surrender all of who you are to all of who he is, he lifts you back up by his power and presence and then he equips you with his Ruach, his Pneuma, his Spirit...LIFE...to go and live in communion with him.

Our worship team is coming back up to sing another song and while they do that - I'm going to pray....

Surrender

Fill us with your Spirit

Help us reject the spirits of this world

Give us new desires for you and help us detest the things that distract us