

WHAT'S IN A BREATH?: The Breath Again! Ezekiel 37:1-14

INTRODUCTION:

Good morning, Trinity! It is good to see you here today. If you are a guest with us, we want to say a very special welcome to you. I'd love the opportunity to get to know you more. You can connect with us by texting the keyword, TBCMP, which stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mount Pleasant, to the number 94-000. When you send that keyword, a link will be sent back to you and that will take you to a short form. When you submit that form, it notifies me and I look forward to following up with you.

Or feel free to swing by our information center located in the fellowship area. There we have a gift we would love to put in your hands and a way of saying thank you for being our guest today. We are thrilled you have chosen to worship with us today.

FOSTER AWARENESS:

You may have wondered why there are diapers in the seats around you and why there is a trash bag and suitcase up here on stage. Today is the day we set aside to bring attention to the number of vulnerable kids in our area. If you had a diaper in your seat, or if you are sitting in a seat near a diaper, would you just stand for a moment?

Let me share with you what this represents. There are 148 diapers spread throughout the worship center today. Each of those diapers represent the 148 kids, just in our region, that are currently awaiting permanent placement. Did you know that there are over 2,000 kids in foster care in East Texas and approximately only 600 foster homes?

What if The Church could bring hope to this situation? What if there were more foster homes available than kids in foster care? And so I am asking you, Church Family, to prayerfully consider becoming a foster parent or to get in the game in some way.

You know, when kids are placed in foster care, the only thing they come with, many times, is a trash bag of personal items and possibly a suitcase. So, when you look across the room this morning, and when you consider what is displayed up here, let's consider the vulnerable children in our region.

Thank you. You may be seated. We have a Christmas Tree set up in the fellowship area this morning. We have partnered with Texas DPS to provide Christmas for foster children in our area. Please stop by and consider helping out this Christmas season.

But also standing at that table is our own, Lisa Fein. She is available this morning to visit with you about what it would look like to get in the game in caring for children in foster care. Please stop by and visit with her.

SERIES OVERVIEW:

I want to invite you to take your bibles, now, and turn with me to the Old Testament book of Ezekiel. The book of Ezekiel is located in a section of the Old Testament known as the major prophet writings. Ezekiel is located between Lamentations and the book of Daniel. We are going to be in chapter 37 this morning.

Today we are landing the plane for a teaching series we've called, "What's in a Breath." We have taken a look at some of the places in the Bible where it is said that God breathes and the significance of God's breath. We've looked at the breath of life, the breath of God's Word, and the last breath of Jesus, and the breath of the Holy Spirit. Today we end our message by looking at the most famous passage in Ezekiel, the valley of the dry bones, as we talk through The Breath Again. Ezekiel 37.

ILLUSTRATION: A Black Thumb

How many of you are good at gardening? Do we have any gardeners in the room this morning? The only thing that I am good at growing are weeds. Anyone else with me? I remember one time at our house, we wanted to plant some cilantro, basil, potatoes, and serrano peppers. I have no idea why we planted potatoes. The other makes sense as we love to make our own salsa. But this garden did not go very well. Everything died in the garden. Maybe I didn't water it enough or it got too much water, I have no idea. But I have a black thumb and every time I plant something I feel like I'm trying everything I can to bring the dead plants back to life. Can anyone else relate to me?

Well, in Ezekiel 37, God gives the prophet an amazing vision. In the middle of a valley of dry bones, God gives this awesome vision. And what happens is that God breathes into the bones in this valley and the things that are dead and hopeless begin to come to life again.

As we talk through this vision, we are going to talk about spiritual dryness, and hopelessness, and feeling far from God. And what is going to happen is that you are going to be able to identify aspects in your life spiritually that are dry or hopeless. The reason I know that is because that's been a reality for me this week. And my prayer is that God will meet you in the midst of that this morning.

Perhaps The Lord will identify something in your life that is dead or dry spiritually speaking. Maybe it is the fact that you are not where you want to be in your relationship with God. Maybe it's a prayer you've been praying for a long time and receiving an answer from God seems to be a lost cause. Or maybe it's a need you have that you seem to have lost hope that it will be met. Whatever it is, my prayer is that The Lord will meet you today and speak to your heart.

And at the end of the message this morning, we will enter into a time of response. And God is going to grab ahold of your heart and maybe for some of you, your response is going to be to embrace Jesus as The Lord of your life for the very first time. For others, you will respond in prayer at this altar begging God for a freshness to fall. Or some of you will ask our elders for prayer. It is my desire that God speak directly to your heart this morning.

I want to teach through the passage today and then draw out some application points for our lives. Let's first read the entirety of the passage of study this morning. Ezekiel 37, verses 1 through 14. ***1The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. 2And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. 3And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord God, you know." 4Then he said to me, "Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. 5Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. 6And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord." 7So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. 8And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. 9Then he said to me, "Prophecy 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." 10So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. 11Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.' 12Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. 13And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. 14And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord."

MESSAGE:

The first thing that is important to look at here is...

1) The Inspection

In the first three verses, God calls Ezekiel to inspect the spiritual landscape of his fellow Jews. Verse 1 says that the hand of God was upon Ezekiel and that God led him, by the Holy Spirit, to a valley. And this valley was full of bones. And The Lord had Ezekiel do two things. He made him sit in the middle of the bones and also walk around the valley.

Why would God do that? It may seem strange to us that the Lord would lead Ezekiel into this position. But do you remember after Jesus was baptized at the end of Matthew chapter 3? Do you remember what came next in the opening chapter of Matthew 4? Matthew 4:1 reads, ***"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit*** [same idea as in Ezekiel 37] ***into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."*** This was the case for Jesus for 40 days! Why does God do such a thing?

Well, sometimes God's will and way seems to be without purpose. But we must understand that His ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts. And His ways are perfect. Furthermore, God is not bound by time so He can see the end at the same time He sees the beginning. We, however, are caught in time and can only see a portion of the tapestry God is weaving.ⁱⁱ See, without Jesus having been tempted, in the wilderness, He would not have been our perfect

sacrifice. Without Ezekiel inspecting the spiritual landscape, he would not have been stirred to preach.

I believe God is giving Ezekiel this experience for the purpose of allowing Ezekiel to inspect the spiritual landscape. To feel the desolation. To come to an understanding of the gravity of the matter.

Notice the conclusion Ezekiel comes to after being placed in the middle of this valley full of bones. Verse 2. ***2**And he **led me around among them**, and behold, there were **very many** on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were **very dry**.*

Now, remember, this is a vision. The children of Israel are in exile in Babylon because of disobedience. God is calling Ezekiel's attention to the spiritual condition of the nation of Israel. Perhaps the same description could be painted of our culture today.

And not only are there a great number of bones but notice that the bones were very dry. In other words, the spiritual condition of the nation of Israel has been dead for a long time. The stench is even gone. These bones are not near death or just died. No. They are fully dead and have been that way for a long time.

Look at what verse 11 tells us. ***11**Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.'" Do you see the hopelessness of the situation? Ever feel as though your hope is lost? That you have been cut off? That is the condition that Ezekiel finds.*

I don't know this to be true, but appears in the context of the passage is Ezekiel is the only one alive in this valley. Everything else is dead. Ever feel like that? And God asks a question in the midst of this evaluation. Verse 3. ***3**And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"* In other words, is it possible for such a hopeless situation to be revived? *And I answered, "O Lord God, you know."* Ezekiel is saying, "Lord, only you know the answer to that question."

And we have the benefit of hindsight here. We know that all things are possible with God. The same God that raised Jesus from the dead, lives. And He lives in you and me. And He desires to bring life to our spiritual dryness.

So, we see the inspection. Secondly, ...

2) The Inspiration

Look with me at verse 4 of Ezekiel 37. ***4**Then he said to me, "**Prophesy over these bones**, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. **5**Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. **6**And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord."*

This is a strange command, isn't it? God tells Ezekiel to prophesy, preach, to the dead and dry bones. Preach to a pit of bones?! Really?! Strange, right? Look what happens in verse 7. ***7**So I prophesied as I was commanded.* Immediate obedience. This blows my mind.

How did Ezekiel get to this point? He's preaching to dead and dry bones. He didn't even protest God's command. He didn't say, "Uh, you know that's bones, right? Like, not even people." No, he just did it.

Listen, the reason Ezekiel was so obedient to God is because of his history in dealing with God. Ezekiel, by this point, has already trusted God in some wild things.ⁱⁱⁱ At one point, God asks Ezekiel to lie on his side for 430 days. This was to represent the number of years that Israel lived in disobedience. Talk about bed sores. God also asked Ezekiel not to speak for 12 years. And there were some other crazy things God asked Ezekiel to do that I'm going to spare us of this morning. Read Ezekiel this week. You'll be entertained.

But my point is that by the time we get to God asking Ezekiel to preach to dry bones, Ezekiel's like, "Sure. Just a typical Tuesday." He had grown to trust God so much that when God asked him to do something to would potentially humiliate him, he was willing to do it. Listen, when you've learned to trust God in all things, you'll be obedient to Him in all things.

Ezekiel's inspiration came from the time he'd already spent with God. And look what happened as a result of his obedience. Verses 7 -10. ***7**So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold [the word "behold" here means to take notice, give special attention to], a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. **8**And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had*

covered them. But there was no breath in them. ⁹Then he said to me, “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.” ¹⁰So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

I mentioned in previous weeks that the word breath in the Scriptures are often translated as spirit. In fact, my Bible has a footnote stating that. The bodies that came together, the dry bones that rattled and came together, were still lifeless. They needed the breath, the spirit, to come into them.

Listen, we may be physically alive, but the greater question is whether or not we are spiritually alive. Is your spirit alive or is it dry and dead?

If it is your testimony that you are spiritually dry or even dead, I have good news for you. God raises dead things to life. He did it in this vision for Ezekiel, He did it in the resurrection of Jesus, and He can do it in your life as well.

That brings me to our third point this morning. We have the inspection, the inspiration, and now...

3) The Invigoration

When God brings dead things to life, He invigorates us. Consider the work God did in this vision to Ezekiel. Verses 11-14. ¹¹Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.’ ¹²Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴And **I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord.**”

Have you ever been where Israelites are in this passage? In verse 11 they say that their hope is lost, and they feel cut off. Ever feel hopeless and cut off from God?

ILLUSTRATION: Article on Spiritual Dryness^{iv}

I read an article this week that talked about what causes spiritual dryness. It pointed out that some people feel spiritually dry because of physical, mental or emotional pain. It is hard to give attention to our spiritual lives when we experience those things.

Sometimes we are spiritually dry because of unconfessed sin in our lives. Sin can cause us to feel distant from God. That feeling leads us to live life for ourselves instead of living for The Lord.

But in verse 14 God says, “**I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord.**”

Remember who Ezekiel is speaking this vision to. The nation of Israel that is living in captivity in Babylon. They are spiritually dead because of their disobedience. But God said that there was coming a time that He is going to place His Spirit, capital S, in them and they will live, be spiritually vibrant. While things are hopeless at the moment, it’s not the end of the story. While they feel cut off from God, they will again know God.

The word translated as, “know,” is a word that means more than having knowledge of something. It means, “knowing by way of experience.”^v While you feel cut off and distant from God, you can know Him, experience Him, again.

Finally, God said to Ezekiel in verse 14, “I will do it.” You can take it to the bank. And that’s what God ultimately did for the nation of Israel. He restored. It is what God ultimately did at the cross by restoring our relationship with Him. And it is what God will do when Jesus comes again.

APPLICATION / CONCLUSION:

In the time we have left, I want to draw a couple application points. First, ...

1) Inspect The Spiritual Landscape.

God had Ezekiel inspect the spiritual landscape. It is good for us to observe the spiritual vibrancy not only of our own lives but also the spirituality of our culture. Why would that be good?

Well, when God leads Ezekiel to the valley of bones, and has him walk around, and he sits in the midst of the desolation, I can only imagine how he felt. Devastated, broken hearted, wondering how things had gotten to this point, and maybe even helpless. What can I do about this?

Don't miss this. God wanted to lead him to that point to see it. Ezekiel needed to see it, feel it, know the reality. And it was only in that moment that he was ready for God's question. Verse 3. ***3And he [being God] said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"*** Only when Ezekiel saw things through God's eyes, and gained God's heart, was he able to answer the question. Look at his answer. Second part of verse 3. ***And I answered, "O Lord God, you know."*** Lord God, this is bad. This looks hopeless. I'm not sure if anything can help this situation. O Lord God, you know. Only you know.

That is a great place to be. You know why? Because when we get to that place in our lives where the only option for us is dependence on God then we give things back over to Him. Only God can know because only God can resurrect.

Have you come to a place in your life where you are convinced that only God can do something about the spiritual desolation in our lives? When we inspect the spiritual landscape surrounding us, then we can see things the way God sees things and we are much more willing to allow God to take control of those things.

Inspect the spiritual landscape. Secondly, ...

2) Obedience to God is Vital.

Verse 7. ***7So I prophesied as I was commanded.*** Skip down to verse 10. ***10So I prophesied as he commanded me.*** Ezekiel was immediately obedient. Here's the deal, delayed obedience is disobedience. If we are going to be used of God and see a move of God, then we must be obedient to God.

Just like God was leading Ezekiel to action, He is leading us to action as well. We are to obey the voice of God. But in order to obey God's voice, we must learn to hear God's voice. What is it that God is calling you to? Are you willing to be obedient to His call on your life?

So, we are to inspect the spiritual landscape and be obedient to God. Thirdly,

...

3) Recognize the Mission.

Real quick, look at verse 10. ***10So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet,*** [what did they become?] ***an exceedingly great army.*** Beloved, we have been brought to spiritual life and vitality for a purpose. If you are a child of God, you have been called to an exceedingly great army. You have been called to a mission. That mission is the Great Commission, to make disciples of all nations. If you are in Christ, you are to live on mission. The church of Jesus is not a cruise ship, you understand. It's an aircraft carrier. We come to this place to be fueled up, bandaged up, encouraged up, so that we can be sent back out to the mission.

If we want to see a move of God, we have to inspect the spiritual landscape, determine to be obedient to God, and then be deployed to execute that which God has called us.

And here's the deal. The consequences if we do not do that is devastating. It's a valley of dry bones.

CONCLUSION:

As we come to the end of our service this morning, I want to ask you a couple questions. Are you spiritually dry? Do you feel cut off this morning? If you do not have a relationship with Jesus, you need to begin there.

The bible says that the wages of our sin is death. What we deserve because of our disobedience to God is eternal death. But the free gift of God is eternal life! If you do not have a relationship with Jesus I invite you in this time of response to come and receive Him and your Lord.

Maybe you're here today and you are just dry spiritually and you need to surrender some things to God. I invite you to join me here at this altar this morning.

[PRAY]

ENDNOTES:

ⁱ Works consulted in preparation of this message: Chuck Swindoll, "Ezekiel Overview," Insight for Living Ministries, accessed online: <https://insight.org/resources/bible/the-major-prophets/ezekiel/>; Precept Austin, "Ezekiel 37 Commentary," Precept Austin, April 22, 2020, accessed online: https://www.preceptaustin.org/ezekiel_37_commentary; Whitney Woollard, "Ezekiel's Bizarre Calling: This Book Can Be Difficult to Digest," published by Bible Project, 2017, accessed online: <https://bibleproject.com/blog/ezekiels-bizarre-calling/>; Charles Spurgeon, "Ezekiel 37: Expositions of the Bible," Published by Truth According to Scripture, accessed online: <https://www.truthaccordingtoscripture.com/commentaries/spe/ezekiel-37.php#.Y20IGS-B1Og>; Got Questions, "What is Spiritual Dryness, and How do I Overcome It?," published by Gotquestions.org, accessed online: <https://www.gotquestions.org/spiritual-dryness.html>; Derek J. Brown, "9 Possible Reasons for your Spiritual Drought," Southern Equip, February 20, 2015, accessed online: <https://equip.sbts.edu/article/nine-possible-reasons-for-your-spiritual-drought/>; Doug Thompson, "What in the World is Going On? How Does Revival Happen?," Published by the Abilene Reflector-Chronicle, March 24 2017, accessed online: http://www.abilene-rc.com/opinion/what-in-the-world-is-going-on-how-does-revival-happen/article_6fffee1e-1099-11e7-94ad-4bdd548aabc5.html; Eric Trimble, "The Breath: Breathe Again," sermon preached at The Church At West Mountain, Gilmer, Texas, Sunday, April 10, 2022.

ⁱⁱ Precept Austin, "Ezekiel 37 Commentary," Precept Austin, April 22, 2020, accessed online: https://www.preceptaustin.org/ezekiel_37_commentary.

ⁱⁱⁱ Observation taken from Eric Trimble's sermon.

^{iv} Got Questions, "What is Spiritual Dryness, and How do I Overcome It?," published by Gotquestions.org, accessed online: <https://www.gotquestions.org/spiritual-dryness.html>.

^v Precept Austin Commentary.